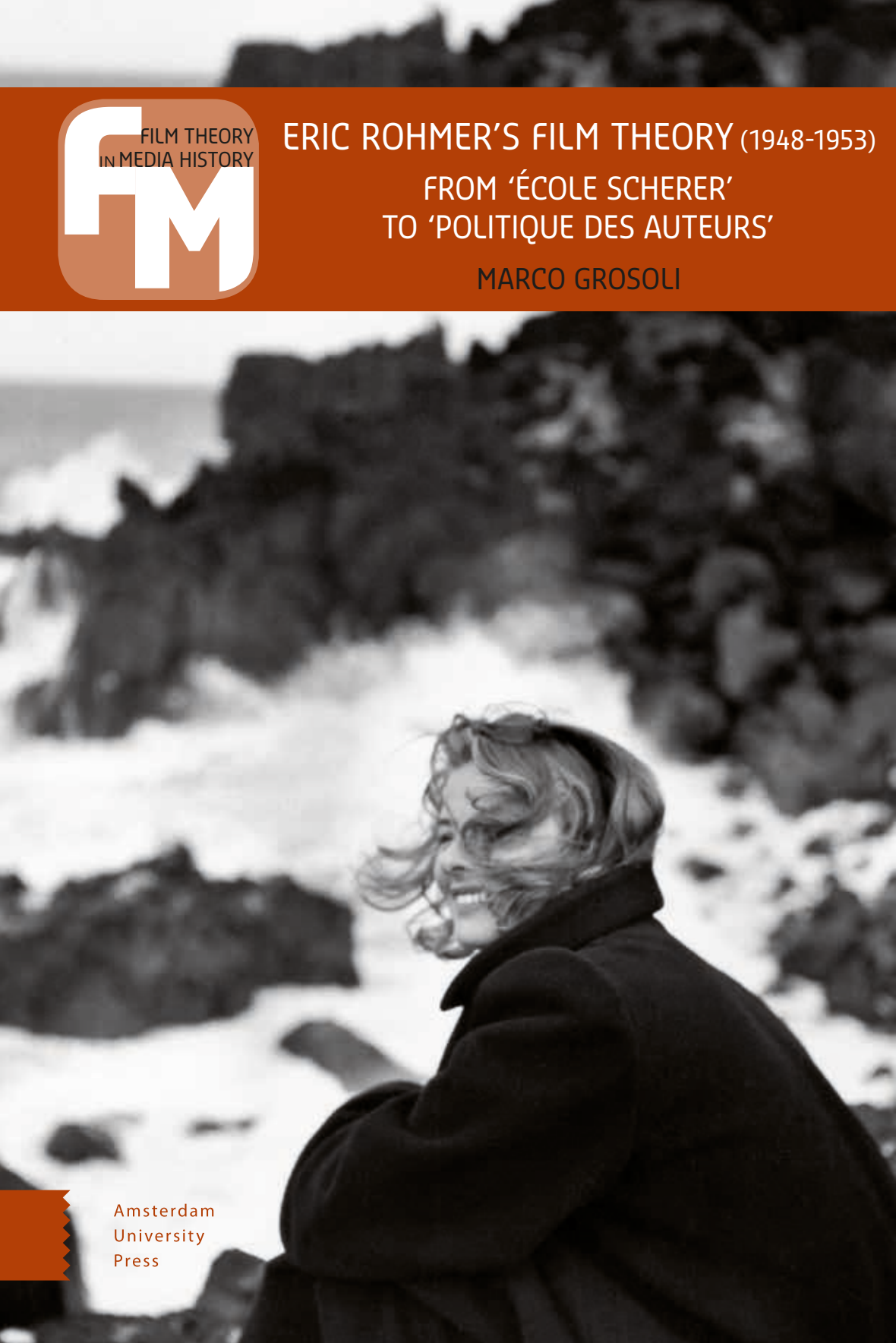

FILM THEORY IN MEDIA HISTORY

ERIC ROHMER'S FILM THEORY (1948-1953)

FROM 'ÉCOLE SCHERER' TO 'POLITIQUE DES AUTEURS'

MARCO GROSOLI

Amsterdam University Press

Eric Rohmer's Film Theory (1948-1953)

Film Theory in Media History

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This book is dedicated to my parents, and to Anica.

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Introduction

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Abstract
This chapter defines the scope of the *Eric Rohmer''s Film Theory* monograph. It analyses the writings published by Eric Rohmer as a film critic (particularly, but not exclusively, between 1948 and 1953), as well as a smaller selection of reviews (primarily from the same period) by fellow critics, who would eventually establish the *politique des auteurs* with him in 1954 – Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, François Truffaut. The book sets out to illustrate how Rohmer's influence on his younger colleagues and, more precisely, Rohmer's rejection of Sartre's teaching in favour of older philosophies and aesthetics (specifically Kant's) in 1950, were key factors in the eventual formation of the *politique des auteurs*.

Keywords: Rohmer, politique, auteurs, école

'Naturally, I see what is hidden behind such exaggerated praise as the Schérer School recently demonstrated with Hitchcock, through pleasantly hypocritical and youthfully paradoxical manners. Such praises, however, can only be accused of slight abundance.'[1]

In these lines, taken from a 1952 article that Pierre Kast published in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* (*CC*), the expression *école Schérer* or 'Schérer school' (éS) appeared for the first time. Thus, Kast designated a group of young Parisian film critics in the late 1940s and early 1950s, sharing significant common ground regarding cinematic tastes and biases.[2] Most typically, for

1 Kast, 'Fiançailles avec le notaire. Notes sur Conrad et le cinéma', p. 22. Originally: 'Je vois bien, naturellement, ce que cache l'éloge outrancier, sympathiquement hypocrite ou juvénilement paradoxal, de la manière récente de Hitchcock par l'école Schérer, éloges qui n'ont contre eux que leur légère abondance.' Unless otherwise indicated, translations from French into English throughout this book are by Zahra Tavassoli Zea.

2 For the most part, the historical background outlined in this chapter is taken from the standard biographical sources about the éS members: De Baecque and Herpe, *Eric Rohmer*; De Baecque and Toubiana, *Truffaut: A Biography*; De Baecque, *Godard*; Brody, *Everything is Cinema*.

instance, they all deeply loved and admired (among others) the cinema of Alfred Hitchcock, a filmmaker who, at that time, was generally deemed to be little more than a particularly skilled movie artisan, and whom these cinephiles regarded as no less profound and thought-provoking than the best novelists of their time. It is safe to argue that the puzzlement that their ideas raised (not least in Kast himself) made it easier to single them out as a consistent, slightly eccentric clique. Its main members were all film critics for the French movie journal *CC* in the 1950s, and film directors from the 1960s onwards: Claude Chabrol (1930-2010), Jean-Luc Godard (1930-), Jacques Rivette (1928-2016), François Truffaut (1932-1984). Their unofficial leader was Maurice Schérer, better-known by his pen name Eric Rohmer (1920-2010). The latter unambiguously stood out as the oldest (he was approaching thirty years old while the others were all between eight and 12 years younger) and most influential member of the bunch. At the time when Chabrol, Godard, Rivette and Truffaut began to regularly gather at the *Ciné-Club Quartier Latin*, run by Rohmer together with Frédéric Froeschel (around 1949-1950), he was already a relatively established intellectual, teaching in a Parisian private high school, while his younger fellows were hitherto completely unknown. Moreover, in 1946, France's most prestigious publishing house, Gallimard, released his first novel, *Elizabeth*. His reputation (and age) thus bestowed a certain authority upon him; as a result, the personal conceptions of cinema that Chabrol, Godard, Rivette and Truffaut were all developing during those early, formative years were inevitably deeply affected by Rohmer's.

In fact, the éS was rarely if ever mentioned, after Kast's 1952 'baptism' – even though a few months later Rohmer acknowledged that 'Pierre Kast formerly did me the honour of appointing me head of a *school*.'[3] To a certain degree, the éS never really existed: it never established itself as an official group, and Rohmer's leadership was never official in any way. Indeed, it was all very informal, little more than some like-minded movie lovers hanging out together, sharing some cinematic inclinations and writing for the same journals.

Why, then, should a whole book, indeed, this present volume, be dedicated to this 'non-entity' (or 'quasi-entity' at best)? One of the reasons why this endeavour is worth undertaking is that it was precisely this circle of critics that eventually brought forth the *politique des auteurs* (pda). As is well known, 'pda' designates the group of young film critics from the French film journal *CC* in the 1950s (Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer, Truffaut),

3 Rohmer, 'Of Three Films and a Certain School', p. 63. See also, De Baecque, *Les cahiers du cinéma: histoire d'une revue*, p. 107.

advocating the importance of the movie director as the main agent responsible for the artistic value of a film. For them, so the story goes, cinema is worth every attention especially whenever an author (including those Hollywood directors, like, for instance, Howard Hawks, who, at the time, were deemed nothing more than impersonal film artisans, uninterested in conveying a personal poetics) enriches his films with a vision of the world and, simultaneously, a vision of the cinema, through *mise en scene* (the art of staging bodies and objects in front of the camera). A true author is someone who expresses him/herself visually through *mise en scene*, rather than by employing literary, writerly tricks and gimmicks (to a well-crafted screenplay); the author's personal poetics are gradually disclosed film after film, so the critic must faithfully follow everything a valuable director makes (even patently bad films) in order to patiently discover and follow that thread as it unravels through the author's filmography.

Although the éS morphed fluidly and without any significant discontinuity into the pda, and although the collective name *politique des auteurs* appeared on paper only a few months thereafter,[4] the pda can be said to have really begun in early 1954, viz. when François Truffaut published his famous, much-discussed pamphlet 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français' (A Certain Tendency of French Cinema[5]). The buzz created by this virulent, irreverent essay tremendously increased the popularity of the pda's insights, after they had been brewing at length during the éS years. Moreover, shortly after its release, and precisely in the wake of the aforementioned buzz, Truffaut was hired by *Arts*, a cultural weekly magazine whose diffusion was much larger than the *CC*'s at that time. Indeed, the periodical ended up employing all the other 'young Turks' (the customary nickname for members of the pda) in the second half of the 1950s. This, too, boosted the fame of the pda.

The pda was massively successful on many levels. In the 1960s, Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer and Truffaut turned filmmaker and gave birth to *Nouvelle Vague* (the French New Wave), i.e. one of the most important phenomena in movie history, regarded by many as the catalyst for cinematic modernity. Their ideas contributed immeasurably to a serious, systematic appreciation of cinema as art. Andrew Sarris exported them to the States, where they became the 'Auteur theory', a revolutionary, extremely fruitful and influential new approach to American cinema. In the United Kingdom, film journal *Movie* appropriated the pda's ideas to promote an idiosyncratic

4 Truffaut, 'Ali Baba et la "Politique des auteurs"'.

5 *Idem*, 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français'.

auteurism. Countless film journals and several national film cultures all over the world were strongly affected by the pda's *auteur*-centrism. Not uncoincidentally, authorship became one of the most rewarding and widespread marketing strategies ('A film by...').

Rivers of ink were spilt arguing about authorship – a theoretical debate that was primarily triggered by the pda. Much fuel was added to this fire by structuralism and post-structuralism, all the rage in the 1960s and beyond, and which gave rise to several structuralism-biased attempts to affirm (Peter Wollen[6]) or dismiss (*Screen* journal in the 1960s and 1970s) the relevance of a pda (possibly with the post-1950s *CC* indecisively shuttling between the two extremes). To some extent, critical discussions on the subject continue today: authorship still attracts much scholarly attention in film studies, and is variously tackled in media theory.

In short, the importance of the pda in the history of film and in the history of film criticism cannot be overestimated. However, the scope of scholarly research on this topic has, hitherto, been surprisingly narrow. In other words, there is an ostensible gap between the enormous importance of the pda and the fairly limited scholarly attention it has received to date. It is true that there is no shortage of excellent historical accounts on the pda.[7] On the other hand, no serious attempt has yet been made to study its *aesthetic* and *theoretical* aspects. This lack is likely related to another fact: as a rule, scholarly accounts, of whatever kind, concerning the pda rely on a very limited number of writings by these critics (despite occasional, commendable efforts to enlarge this scope, such as the collection edited by Jim Hillier),[8] in the face of an overwhelming abundance of articles and reviews which they wrote during the 1950s (amounting to several hundred). As a result, the pda has often been outlined in a simplistic way, and reduced to a reactionary nostalgia for the aesthetic preponderance of the subjective vision of the artist. In fact, by drawing upon these hundreds of little-read articles, it is easy to realize that a much more complex and interesting theory and aesthetics of cinema lies at the core of their auteurism.

There is plenty of evidence that the exaltation of those directors who managed to turn mainstream films (typically, the outcomes of a highly impersonal and standardized productive context) into a personal creation

6 Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*.

7 Primarily, the two official histories of the *CC*: De Baecque, *Les cahiers du cinéma: histoire d'une revue*, and Bickerton, *A Short History of* Cahiers du Cinéma.

8 Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma. The 1950s*.

simply cannot be the pda's original, distinctive trait. To regard openly impersonal American directors as *auteurs* – as individuals expressing a personal vision using, in particular, *mise en scene*, and taking into account the way the visual dimension of their films is handled – was nothing new in post-war France. In the 1920s, the first golden age of French film criticism (whose cohort included Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein *et al.*) already envisaged authorship in a fairly similar way – as did a considerable number of the wealth of movie magazines circulating in France after the war: not only those journals that played a more or less direct role in the creation of *CC*, like *L'Ecran français*, or Jean-George Auriol's short-lived (1946-1949) second series *La Revue du cinéma*,[9] but also those that, like *L'Âge du cinéma*,[10] partly foreshadowed the line of *Positif* (*CC's* main competitor). As for the *CC* themselves, monographic studies on Edward Dmytryk, Cecil B. DeMille and Joseph Mankiewicz had already appeared in the first five issues, and *none* of them was written by Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer or Truffaut. Therefore, the true originality and relevance of the pda must lie elsewhere. It is by no means in the auteurist claim or cult per se, but rather in the whole spectrum of theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic *premises* underpinning it. The young Turks did not praise the genius of the *auteurs* purely on the basis of their idiosyncratic, arbitrary, tyrannical tastes,[11] but rather based on theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic premises that must be clearly singled out in order to properly understand what the pda was really about. The *auteurs* they praised were not selected randomly; rather, directors as

9 For instance, Auriol's six-part pompous, unfocused, maladroit, theoretically confusing manifesto, foreshadowing various aspects that *CC* would develop more thoroughly, such as the connection between auteurism and a certain Catholic mysticism, ended with the capital-lettered plea 'PREPARONS-NOUS A FAIRE NOS FILMS NOUS-MEMES' ('let's prepare to make our films ourselves'); see Auriol, 'Faire des films. Les origines de la mise en scène'; 'D'abord les écrire'; 'Avec la technique et du génie'; 'Pour qui?'; 'Avec qui?'; 'Comment?'. Hollywood director Irving Pichel signed an article called 'La création doit être l'ouvrage d'un seul' (Creation Must be the Work of One Person); monographic studies on Ernst Lubitsch, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Georges Rouquier and Jean Grémillon were regularly included in the tables of contents.

10 Here is what the editorial board has to say in the very first (collective) article of its very first issue ('A la recherche d' une avant-garde'), in 1951: 'We welcome, on the other hand, an era of a total freedom of expression: technical means are tamed, the very financial means can be tackled by Cinema in a reduced format. Masters of their own writing, filmmakers no longer have any reason to make mediocre films' (p. 2). Originally: 'Nous saluons, par contre, celle [l'ère] d'une liberté totale d'expression: les moyens techniques sont domptés, les moyens financiers eux-mêmes peuvent être contournés, par le Cinéma en format réduit. Maîtres de leur écriture, les cinéastes n'ont plus aucune raison de réaliser des films médiocres.'

11 Antoine de Baecque, for instance, often claims that they relied exclusively on the capricious arbitrariness of their tastes. See, for instance, De Baecque, *La Cinéphilie*, p. 21.

different as Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, Otto Preminger, Anthony Mann, Roberto Rossellini, Jean Renoir, Max Ophuls and the others were given the rank of *auteurs insofar as their cinemas complied with the implicit, but nonetheless strongly underlying aesthetics that the pda subscribed to*. To overlook this background means to fail to properly understand the pda, its ideas and its inclinations.

The present volume is the outcome of a research project that, in its very early phases, never intended to tackle the éS per se. Thanks to a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship (undertaken at the University of Kent between 2012 and 2015), I conducted an extensive study of the pda in order to provide a new, more accurate view of what these critics really advocated. By taking a closer look at their entire written production,[12] I attempted a radical revision of the received idea of the pda. This meant going back to basics, i.e. to the several hundred articles written by Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer and Truffaut from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, in order to reconstruct the theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic background against which the pda could assert and articulate their auteurism. However, it soon became clear that such a reconstruction required a 'spacing' of the éS years, i.e. the early 'incubation phase' of the pda. Only by dealing *separately* with the timespan that preceded the advent proper of the pda, and by studying it in its own terms, can those theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic premises be laid bare effectively, because that is when they were most decisively moulded, particularly under the impulse of Eric Rohmer, who, at that time, was certainly the most influential member of that group. I thus decided to devote one book to so-called éS, and one to the pda. The former (viz. the present volume) covers roughly the written production by Rohmer between 1948 (i.e. when he started to publish his first articles) and 1960 in *La Revue du cinéma*, *La Gazette du cinéma*, *CC*, *Arts* and other minor publications, as well as the written production by Godard, Rivette and Truffaut up until the end of 1953, on the eve of 'A Certain Tendency of French Cinema' (Chabrol only

12 This long-due exploration has taken place in the wake of the rediscovery of the integral corpus of writings by another major player of the 1950s *CC*: André Bazin (who published nearly 2,600 articles between 1943 and 1958, mostly in newspapers, reviews and film magazines, only six per cent of which have been republished in anthologies or edited essay collections). Thanks to this rediscovery (carried out in recent times by, among others, Dudley Andrew and Hervé Joubert-Laurencin), descriptions of Bazin's film critical practice could emerge that are somewhat more accurate than the clichéd image scholarly accounts have often provided (according to which the critic was a naïve realist, blindly convinced of the camera's power to reproduce empirical reality). Partly encouraged by these reappraisals, the republication (set for 2018) of every single article by Bazin has been finally set in motion by Joubert-Laurencin and by French publishing house Macula.

began to write in 1953, and therefore remains almost completely outside of the scope of this book). In the second volume, this proportion will basically be reversed: Rohmer will be a somewhat inconspicuous presence, while the main focus will be on what Chabrol, Godard, Rivette and Truffaut wrote from early 1954 (when Truffaut's milestone article was published, thereby, in effect, inaugurating the pda) until they all quit film criticism.

Clearly, a few words should be expended on this apparently odd methodological choice. In principle, while the first book describes the Rohmer-led process of formation of the set of implicit assumptions underpinning the pda (approximately between 1948 and 1953), the second will closely examine and analyse the pda (approximately between 1954 and the advent of the French New Wave) in the light of these assumptions. That said, why does the first book examine Rohmer's articles until the end of the 1950s (and even slightly beyond),[13] while the other articles examined stop in 1953? The point is that Rohmer's ideas on cinema 'freeze' after his 1950 conversion (to be discussed in more detail later) and remain singularly steadfast and unchanged throughout the following decade. Put differently, for the other critics, the éS wraps up somewhere around 1953, i.e. when they all started to gain some autonomy and to stand in their own right as personal, original, individual voices, while for Rohmer *it never finished*, because, unlike the others, Rohmer thought and wrote fundamentally the same things throughout the 1950s. Hence it is no contradiction to make use of texts written by Rohmer after 1953, in order to illustrate the phase (the éS) that he used to lead and that ended around 1953. Post-1953 writings by Rohmer are a persistent reminder of the initial spark that brought the group together.

All things considered, there is no real discontinuity between the éS and the pda. There is no such thing as an incubation period, neatly distinguished from a subsequent mature phase. The individual differences among their members notwithstanding, both 'éS' and 'pda' fundamentally designate the same thing, the same group of people, the same ideas spanning, approximately, a dozen years. That distinction is, as it were, nothing but a 'heuristic abstraction': the éS phase has been singled out in a fairly arbitrary way in order to highlight a period of intense and decisive brewing, which would otherwise remain obscure and shadowy, but which should not be overlooked if one is to understand what the pda was really about. Nevertheless, the éS

13 To say nothing of the rather frequent recourse to a treatise about music (*De Mozart en Beethoven*) through the lens of Kantian philosophy, which Rohmer published in 1998, and which also encompassed a lengthy and very useful recapitulation/systematization of his early insights about cinema.

and the pda are fundamentally the same phenomenon, the same way of looking at films. Their cinematic assessments were based on the same set of implicit assumptions; periodization into two distinct phases is only meant to suggest that the pda did not come out of the blue in the mid-1950s, and before it caught significant public attention it underwent some elaboration during the handful of years prior to 'A Certain Tendency of French Cinema'. There has been an evolution on the surface over the years, but the inner core of their conception of cinema remained substantially unchanged throughout the éS and the pda phases, without any significant mutation or disruption. For this reason, the present volume, its focus on 1948-1953 (with the exception of Rohmer, as outlined above) notwithstanding, occasionally stretches out to some later articles: the matter at stake is fundamentally the same, before as well as after the 1953-1954 divide. There, then, no incoherence in these allegedly inappropriate 'flash-forwards', or in using them to illustrate the earlier 'incubation' phase (the éS).

On the other hand, there is at least one significant difference between the éS and the pda: the éS is characterized by Rohmer's predominance, whereas in the later, pda era in particular Rivette and Truffaut, but also Chabrol and Godard increasingly developed a personal, original approach of their own. In the few years that followed 1948, Rohmer was unquestionably the most prolific, while the less frequent writings by the others often bore conspicuous traces of Rohmer's ideas and biases. As time went by, though, his younger fellows gradually gained autonomy and independence (while still having a lot in common with one another). Hence, the present volume deals almost exclusively with Rohmer: at that time, he was the one who led the way, while the others mostly followed, so their writings will only occasionally be referred to here. In most cases, they will only be quoted in order to support and expand on some Rohmerian point, since most of them cannot be said to be much more than ancillary to Rohmer's vision of cinema.

It should be made clear immediately that this book *is not a history* of the éS. Other works, such as the histories of the *CC* compiled by Antoine de Baecque or Emily Bickerton, already provide all of the (actually rather scant) historical coordinates framing the phenomenon at stake. My book will skip many of the historical circumstances related to the emergence and the development of the éS/pda: in most cases, it will take such knowledge for granted. This book wishes to *integrate* already existing histories of the éS/pda by providing an in-depth overview of the content of the entire written production by these critics during the early éS years (and, to a lesser extent, afterwards, with, as explained, the exception of Rohmer); thus, ideally, it is

aimed at readers who are already familiar (even if only in broad brushstrokes) with the history of the éS/pda (possible gaps can be filled by referring to, among others, De Baecque's and Bickerton's reconstructions).

It is nonetheless useful to recall the main stages of the group's establishment, by means of a concise timeline:

1948. Rohmer publishes his first article ('Cinema, an Art of Space') in *La revue du cinéma* movie journal.[14] In December, he founded the *Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin* along with Frédéric Froeschel, one of the students at the high school he used to teach at.

1949. Rivette moves to Paris. He meets Rohmer (whose 'Cinema, an Art of Space' deeply impressed him)[15] on the very day of his arrival, at the *Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin*. Along with Claude Chabrol (another aficionado of this *Ciné-Club*), the two attend the *Festival du Film Maudit* in Biarritz, organized by *Objectif 49*, a film society that included among

14 *La Revue du cinéma* was founded by Jean-George Auriol in 1928, but lasted only three years (Plot, *Un manifeste pour le cinema*). The same man tried to revive the review in 1946, but it had to come to a halt again by 1949 due to financial hardship. Auriol's death in a car accident, in 1950, pushed several of his friends to put together yet another journal, in order to continue what *La Revue du cinéma* had stood for. This new, monthly magazine would eventually be called *CC*. The fact that the publication given a second life in 1946 had exactly the same name as its forerunner, *La Revue du cinéma*, indicates that Auriol and the others were, to a degree, still looking at the Twenties, the decade of the first golden age of French film criticism and theory; hence, a certain sense of outdatedness emanates from its pages, even at that time. Jean-Pierre Jeancolas ('De 1944 à 1958', pp. 61-64) pointed out that, in the second half of the Forties, while French film criticism was faced with practical (means were scarce, but the State decided to actively support the rebirth of film criticism as a pedagogical instrument for the sake of the masses), social/historical (the *épuration*, the wave of official trials against former collaborationists, variously involving people from the film world as well, like Henri-Georges Clouzot) and political (for and against American cinema, for and against *Citizen Kane* and other topics clearly echoing impending Cold War) issues, *La Revue du cinéma* maintained a singularly detached attitude of pure aestheticism, far more in touch with interwar film-critical agenda than with a post-Liberation one. (It should also be noted that such an apolitical stance is not the only feature that would eventually be shared with *CC*.) Crucially, much like in the Twenties, cinema was seen by many contributors as a potential art form, insofar as it was a *temporal* art, i.e. because of the rhythmic values moving images could assume, and of the temporal patterns editing could construct. Jacques Bourgeois is a good case in point. A music critic interested in motion-painting-like experimentations, as well as in abstract and animated films, Bourgeois longed for a 'Proustian' cinema venturing into the irregular meanders of Time (see, for instance, Jacques Bourgeois, 'La peinture animée'; 'Le cinéma à la recherche du temps perdu'). In such a context, to call cinema 'an art of space', as Rohmer did, was a rather original and disruptive idea, one naturally destined to open new paths and to reverse trends – as well as to put the author of that article under the spotlight, which, of course, largely contributed to the coming together of the éS.

15 Frappat, *Jacques Rivette: Secret compris*, p. 60.

its members Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, André Bazin, Jacques Cocteau, René Clément, Robert Bresson, Pierre Kast and Alexandre Astruc. There, they meet Truffaut. The four of them start to hang out regularly at the *Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin*, where they meet Godard shortly thereafter. Meanwhile, Rohmer is kicked out off the prestigious journal *Les Temps modernes* (run by Jean-Paul Sartre).

1950. In May, Rohmer launches *La Gazette du cinéma*, a short-lived movie journal that only published five issues, until November of that same year. Godard and Rivette also contribute to the journal. Truffaut instead starts to publish his first film reviews in *Elle*, *Ciné-Digest*, *Lettres du monde* and *France-Dimanche*. In the summer, Rivette publishes an article in *Gazette* violently attacking *Objectif 49* and its *Festival du Film Maudit*, whose second edition is attended by the whole of the éS – this time as a much more close-knit and exclusive group. In September, Rohmer sees *Stromboli* (1949) by Roberto Rossellini; the film shocks him so much that he eventually declared that during that screening he underwent a veritable *conversion*, which, among other things, led him to reject the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre. He also quits the direction of the *Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin*. A few weeks later, Truffaut joins the Army.

1951. In April, the first issue of the *CC* sees the light. The yellow-covered movie journal is run by André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Joseph-Marie Lo Duca (who abandons the project shortly thereafter). It is not long before all of the éS is regularly writing for CC.

1952. In February, after some very troubled months (partially spent in jail), Truffaut quits the Army and settles in Bazin's apartment, where he would stay for a couple of years. Godard temporarily quits film criticism and Paris; he would only write about films again from 1956. Other éS members continue to watch films and write about them, mainly in *CC*. They also dabble in filmmaking from time to time (particularly Rohmer).

The rest of this book will provide extensive proof of Rohmer's influence over the rest of this circle. While this impact should be reiterated, it should also be accompanied by an important clarification. On the one hand, even Dudley Andrew, who has frequently (and rightly) insisted on the substantial influence André Bazin (1918-1958) exerted over François Truffaut, acknowledged that

> Truffaut always honoured teachers above parents, calling them adult protectors whom you could choose to follow. Bazin stood somewhere between parent and teacher. If there were a serious teacher in Truffaut's life, it would have to be Rohmer who seems to have played that role for

> many at *La Gazette du Cinéma*. In fact, Rohmer actually was a teacher by profession, and he commanded respect as teachers can. His tastes in films were notoriously rigorous; he prided himself on high standards; and his younger acolytes weighed everything he said, accepting much of it.[16]

As we shall see, Rohmerian undertones are also extremely recurrent in Godard's writings prior to 1952 (that is, before he quit reviewing films for about four years), as well as in those by Chabrol.[17] As for Rivette, he had known about 'Cinema, an Art of Space' and its author even before he moved to Paris, when he was living in Rouen. A recognizable influence on Rivette's articles for the *Gazette du cinéma*, Rohmer also introduced his younger colleague to the oeuvre of Honoré de Balzac, famously one of the richest sources of inspiration for his subsequent career as a filmmaker.[18]

On the other hand, one must hasten to add that Rivette himself soon started to be fairly influential. In those early days, he was seen, as Godard once declared, as a sort of ultimate holder of Cinematic Truth, and if Godard liked a film that happened to be despised by Rivette, he would immediately reverse his judgement.[19] Truffaut's 'best friend and [...] true movie-loving companion,'[20] Rivette even taught him what *mise en scène* (the art of staging) was really about, according to the director of *The 400 Blows* himself.[21] Even Rohmer acknowledged that 'There is an extraordinary influence in Rivette. He was often called eminence grise. In fact, he was "the eminence grise of the New Wave" because he hid in the shadow a bit, and didn't write much. But each article he wrote really had a great impact.'[22]

Initially, the éS was principally inspired by Rohmer's views, but after a while Rivette slowly started to add his own influence to that of his older pal, first at the informal, scarcely documentable level of personal, intra-group

16 Andrew, 'Every Teacher Needs a Truant', p. 226.

17 For instance, the heavily moralistic undertones, the championing of good taste as opposed to vulgarity, and the neoclassical optimism that can be discerned in 'Que ma joie demeure', his first article for the *CC*, almost appear as cheap caricatures of the similar biases characterizing most writings by Rohmer.

18 Dosi, *Trajectoires balzaciennes dans le cinéma de Jacques Rivette*, p. 57.

19 Godard, 'L'art à partir de la vie [Interview with Alain Bergala]', p. 10.

20 De Baecque and Toubiana, *Truffaut*, p. 78.

21 Esdraffo, 'Rivette, Jacques', p. 338.

22 Declaration by Eric Rohmer quoted in Michimoto, *The History, Formation and Criticism of the Nouvelle Vague*, p. 86. Originally: 'En Rivette il y a une influence extraordinaire. Enfin on l'a appelé beaucoup "l'eminence grise", d'ailleurs, "l'éminence grise de la Nouvelle Vague" parce qu'il se cachait un peu en l'ombre et il a peu écrit. Mais chaque article qu'il a écrit a vraiment marqué extrêmement'.

relationships, and then, from around 1953, by publishing articles in *CC* that eventually proved to be nothing short of seminal. The first review he wrote for that journal[23] went relatively unnoticed, but the second one, about Howard Hawks,[24] left a durable mark, not only on the éS/pda, but also on (at least French) film culture in general.[25] In other words, Rivette's influence was little more than *subterranean* in the éS years, started to gain prominence during the transition phase between the éS and the pda, and, subsequently, became increasingly apparent, particularly as he and Truffaut (whose writings were thoroughly influenced by Rivette) began to emerge as original, individual, recognizably idiosyncratic critical voices.

These aspects will be tackled in our follow-up book about the pda: as Rivette's influence is likely to have occurred at a personal level, but is not *yet* discernible in the texts by the éS between 1948 and 1953, it falls out of the scope of the present, Rohmer-focused volume. For the time being, it is worth noting that Rivette's approach is, of course, distinct from Rohmer's but not necessarily incompatible. Indeed, both peacefully coexisted not only in the éS years, but also throughout the 1950s. Then, in 1958, Bazin died, and the two critics engaged in a long-lasting fight for succession in order to take control of the *CC*. This inevitably exacerbated their mutual differences (roughly put: the elder was a classicist, while the younger tended to regard cinema in modern/modernist terms); but, in the éS years, their differences were still contingent, and very far from being relevant enough to undermine their substantial affinity.

As mentioned earlier, this book is not a history of the éS. Its approach is mostly *synchronic*: it aims to re-read very closely all the articles these critics wrote between 1948 and 1953 (as well as a number of later ones), side-by-side as it were, in search of significant patterns, parallelisms and regularities that infer the existence of a set of implicit assumptions behind their choices and opinions. In fact, these assumptions were mostly of an aesthetic, theoretical and philosophical kind,[26] and significantly matched

23 Rivette, 'Un nouveau visage de la pudeur'.

24 *Idem*, 'Génie de Howard Hawks'.

25 Tellingly, it has been celebrated by even a critic as diffident towards the New Wave and towards the film critical environment from which it stemmed as Jacques Lourcelles, who labelled (in his *Dictionnaire des films*, pp. 272 and 1587) that article as none other than 'the birth of modern film criticism.'

26 Social, political and historical issues in the strict sense are left completely aside: while scholars have often highlighted the pda's overtly apolitical nature; it must be added that the éS is certainly no less so.

Rohmer's own aesthetic, theoretical and philosophical preferences at that time, as attested by most biographical sources. As Antoine de Baecque rightly pointed out, 'Sartre, Malraux: so, at the origin of the young critique's aesthetics, we have philosophers and not other, more ancient, critics like Delluc, Moussinac, or Richter. This is important because it instantly reveals that the cinephile thought developed towards the philosophical and literary path.'[27] True, Sartre's books had a tremendous impact on young Rohmer, but another philosophical influence proved even more decisive: Immanuel Kant. An unusually large part of the present volume is dedicated to sketchily summarizing Sartre's and Kant's philosophies. This might seem inappropriate in a book principally dealing with film criticism, but the paramount role played by these two philosophers in Rohmer's cinematic thought makes tackling them at length unavoidable.

This preponderance of synchrony over diachrony, however, should be questioned, bracketed, redefined and reformulated. It would be inaccurate to assume that this volume will only inspect the éS's texts closely and 'horizontally', pretending that no significant discontinuity took place between 1948-1953. In fact, the entire book is structured around *one* single fracture, the importance of which, as far as the coming into focus of the éS is concerned, cannot be overestimated: Rohmer's 1950 conversion during a screening of *Stromboli*. The present study argues, among other things, that, crucially: 1) the éS was formed out of a sort of original 'big bang', namely Rohmer's rejection of Sartre's perspective in favour of a return to Kant's transcendental turn and to the philosophical idealism born in its aftermath; and 2) this U-turn is epitomized by *Stromboli*, particularly the way Rohmer saw it. Accordingly, the third chapter, which analyses *Stromboli* and Rohmer's reading of Rossellini's film, is the central pivot around which the entire structure of the volume revolves. Chapters one and two mainly focus on the pre-conversion period (1948-1950), while Chapters four, five and six cover the years after 1950. So, indeed, there is a (very basic) narrative going on here: in very broad terms, the story of the origins of the éS (hence of the pda too) is the story of Rohmer's rejection of Sartre's perspective, and of the reverberations of this rejection on his younger colleagues. The turning point of this story, as Rohmer himself admitted, was the screening of *Stromboli*. By that time, Rohmer had already come up with a rather anti-Sartrean theory of

27 De Baecque, *La cinéphilie*, p. 44. Originally: 'Sartre, Malraux: à l'origine de l'esthétique de la jeune critique, on trouve donc des écrivains philosophes et non d'autres critiques, plus anciens, comme Delluc, Moussinac, ou Richter. Cela est important, et témoigne d'emblée de l'orientation de la réflexion cinéphile vers la voie philosophique et littéraire.'

the relationships between cinema and literature; nevertheless, only during *Stromboli* did he decide to abandon Sartre's perspective for good. While he did admit that a conversion from Sartre's perspective took place (we shall see this at the beginning of Chapter three), he never clearly specified *to what* exactly he subsequently converted; yet, even though Rohmer never openly stated so, many elements in his own review of that film and in other writings by him ultimately suggest that Rossellini's masterpiece inadvertently pointed at a theoretical framework – Kant's – that could effectively replace that of Sartre. Of course, *Stromboli* is not directly about Kant, nor does it talk about Kant. However, as we shall see in Chapter three, many elements in that film can be read in a Kantian vein, particularly by a teacher, such as the 30-year-old Rohmer, with a sound academic curriculum.

Chapter one outlines Rohmer's ideas about the relationship between cinema and literature, particularly around 1948-1949. Those ideas were both still Sartrean, and already longing to overcome Sartre's perspective. In other words, at that time, Rohmer confusedly felt the need to abandon Existentialism, without clearly knowing where to go from there. The same conundrum manifests itself in two extremely influential 1948 articles by Alexandre Astruc (examined in Chapter two), which also seem to signal a way out of it. Chapter three describes the 1950 conversion, when that 'way out' was found in an anti-Sartrean return to Kant's transcendental turn, ultimately epitomized by *Stromboli*. Chapter four fleshes out this conversion and its manifold implications, while leaving to Chapter five specifically to the new notion of the interdependence between ethics and aesthetics ensuing from that conversion. Chapter six identifies the unorthodox classicism embraced by Rohmer in the wake of his conversion. Final conclusions (plus an important 'flash-forward' to the pda years) are drawn in Chapter seven.

'I've written very little theory, when I was a cinema critic I didn't make references to Kant or any other philosopher, well, hardly, but it underlay everything. What André Bazin called my theory of cinema is underpinned by what we could call transcendental idealism.'[28] Such declarations are common in Rohmer's later interviews. This book tries, primarily, to reconstruct and bring to light the hidden, implicit transcendental idealism underpinning Rohmer's film criticism and, by extension, a major part of the written production by the young Turks in the pre-pda, éS years. More precisely, it attempts to retrace the shift from a conception of cinema loosely and precariously grounded on Husserlian/Heideggerian/Sartrean transcendental

28 Declaration by Eric Rohmer taken from Gérard Legrand and François Thomas, 'Interview with Eric Rohmer', p. 104.

idealism, to one more firmly grounded on Kant's transcendental idealism. In other words, it attempts to delineate the gradual coming into focus of Rohmer's need to react against Sartrean perspective by returning to the original roots of transcendental idealism (that is, Kant), as well as the way this U-turn profoundly affected and shaped the then-emerging film criticism of not only Rohmer himself, but also Chabrol, Godard, Rivette and Truffaut. Indeed, Rohmer's about-face, and the aesthetic of cinema more or less implicitly ensuing from it, was the background against which the pda could be developed.

It should be added, though, that by turning his back on twentieth-century phenomenology in favour of its Kantian sources, Rohmer chose to openly embrace not only Kant, but also other non-contemporary influences, such as Goethe, Aristotle, German idealism, Catholicism, Alain[29] *et al.* Dogmatically attached to the past as it may seem (and Rohmer never shied away from being regarded that way), his approach was also singularly eclectic. At any rate, the present volume does not try in any way to pursue a thorough reconstruction of every single influence that shaped Rohmer's view. Rather it focuses, almost exclusively, on Kant's influence, insofar as Rohmer's rejection of Sartre (the original spark that, ultimately, resulted in the pda) consisted primarily of a return to the original conception of Kant's 'transcendental turn, which Sartre tried to revise (indeed, it was the foundational gesture of his whole philosophical system). Most other influences on film critic Eric Rohmer, while no less important (particularly Aristotle and Goethe), are only touched upon in passing: they fall less directly under the scope of this study, as it mainly revolves around that particular element underpinning Rohmer's seminal 'U-turn'.

Then again, this 'narrative' should be taken with a grain of salt. Of course, things are always less clear-cut. In Rohmer's career as a film critic, there is no such thing as an initial 'Sartrean' phase followed by a 'Kantian' one after his conversion. The latter (arguably, once again, little more than a 'heuristic abstraction'), simply brought about a radicalization of those anti-Sartrean tendencies that had already been there from the very beginning. We should

29 The biography by De Baecque and Herpe reports Rohmer as stating more than once that French philosopher Alain (1868-1951), pseudonym of Emile-Auguste Chartier, was his most decisive philosophical influence ever. A very prolific writer, he authored both original philosophical works and accounts on other philosophers, among whom Descartes, Hegel and Kant. All things considered, Alain (who often affirmed that he contented himself with taking over from great thinkers from the past) seems to have influenced Rohmer less as an original thinker in his own terms than he did as a 'mediator' between his own epoch and a number of past philosophical legacies.

not think of his pre- and post-1950 phases as neatly distinct; rather, they are two different nuances of an approach that fundamentally remains the same. It can be argued that, after his conversion, Rohmer's film criticism just 'becomes itself', after having been only potentially so in the beginning – but it does not really undergo any drastic, traumatic change.

Four more caveats should be noted in order to correctly grasp the overall design of the present study.

First, we should not expect too much subtlety from the éS's appropriation of Sartre, Kant and other thinkers. Sometimes, their interpretations are debatable; fundamentally, the éS only wanted to appropriate their basic tenets in order to put together an aesthetic of cinema, so there was no real reason for the éS (Rohmer included) to explore them any further. In short, Rohmer and the others barely skimmed the surface of these philosophies, so our account will not delve very deeply into them either. More generally, a large part of the éS's discourse will probably sound obscure, unlikely, old-fashioned, preposterous, inane, hopelessly idealistic and pitifully out of touch with the latest developments of Film Studies in recent decades, so the reader may be reasonably struck by the almost complete absence of criticism of it. It should also be clear, however, that the absence of criticism does not necessarily entail an endorsement. The purpose of this book is different: it is not meant to establish whether these critics were right or wrong, but rather to bring to the fore the underlying logic behind what they wrote. Hence, condemnations and disapprovals will be deliberately omitted. The point is whether there *is* an internal coherence, a consistent logic, and what it is like, not whether this logic is to be endorsed or refuted. That said, first, one has to pick up the pieces and put them together until a clearer picture comes into view, something holding together the ideas of the éS and making them exist as an identifiable, recognizable whole. Regardless of whether the éS was right or wrong, it was the origin of the pda, and should be investigated as such. In order to properly understand the pda (an endeavour that will only be undertaken in the follow-up book to this present research), one must know its origins; this is why a close, mostly but not exclusively synchronic (in the sense outlined above) re-reading of the texts by the éS in order to reconstruct its inner logic is mandatory. Only thus can a more rounded, more accurate definition of the pda come into view.

Secondly, as we have seen earlier in this Introduction, Rohmer has acknowledged the paramount role played by transcendental idealism in his film criticism, in spite of the complete absence of direct philosophical references in his texts. The question thus arises as to why these references

were never spelled out. To my knowledge, Rohmer never provided a clear-cut answer to this, but perhaps there is a clue in the fact that, for Rohmer, to turn one's back on Sartre and his Existentialism meant, primarily, to free cinema from the yoke of literature and an overload of intellectual references in his writings about cinema would have been easily counterproductive in that respect. Moreover, this reticence regarding philosophical references cannot but raise an important methodological issue, as it compels our investigation to 'connect the dots' in an inevitably inventive way, to such an extent that, sometimes, a dangerously thin line seems to separate research-based reconstruction of the object of inquiry from its *invention*. There is no doubt that this object (the aesthetic, theoretical, philosophical assumptions underlying the éS) actually existed, as Rohmer himself acknowledged its weight; yet, its utterly unspoken status necessarily forces our study to formulate somewhat daring hypotheses. In other words, the present research supposes the éS critics to have implied things that were stated only indirectly in their writings. This 'leap' beyond scholarly orthodoxy, however, is unavoidable if one is not to lose grip on the object of inquiry: because the éS/pda always deliberately refused to conform to academic systematizations and categorizations, scholarly research finds itself obliged to adjust its methods accordingly.

Thirdly, this study focuses primarily on a 'horizontal', synchronic re-reading of the texts of the éS, and privileges the reconstruction of the éS's underlying assumptions and inner logic over whatever external connection between the éS and the 'outer world' can be posited. This means that not only contextualizations of a historical, social, political kind are left aside, but also the whole issue of 'authorship': This volume will not try to answer in any way such questions as 'what is the conception of authorship of the éS?' or 'how and where would the éS position itself in the broader debate about authorship that the pda triggered and that, to some extent, continues today?' Such questions will rather be tackled in the follow-up book, which will centre around the 'Hegelian twist' performed by Rivette upon the Kantian background laid by Rohmer, and the decisive effects that this 'twist' had on Truffaut's auteurism-oriented film criticism. Any kind of broader historical and theoretical framing (such as: the relationships between the pda and (post)structuralism-oriented theories of authorship), as well as most of the critical literature hitherto produced on the subject, are, for the most part, prudently left out the scope of the present volume, and are only touched upon on sporadic occasions (in all likelihood, less frequently than most academic research standards would prescribe). Nevertheless, I maintain that the risk of 'vacuum-sealing' the object of inquiry is worth

running, because the subject matter at stake is delicate enough to justify a close, in-depth study of it *in itself*, as a preliminary step for every sort of comparison, confrontation and connection to be *subsequently* established. Not that there is any shortage of elements that could lend themselves to such a purpose, if only for the surprisingly proto-Deleuzian undertones that can be occasionally glimpsed in some of the éS's positions.

Fourthly, readers might be legitimately struck by the almost complete absence of André Bazin from the present volume. Bazin is commonly regarded as a 'benevolent father' who fostered the emergence of the pda from within the *CC* he used to run at that time. However, Hervé Joubert-Laurencin has convincingly demonstrated[30] that it is highly arbitrary to suppose a fundamental continuity between the discourse of the pda and the discourse of Bazin. There is no doubt that Bazin entertained a complex relationship with the pda (a relationship I intend to tackle in a series of essays and papers beyond this book), but, argues Joubert-Laurencin, it was frequently a conflictual one. At the very least, one is compelled to acknowledge that Bazin and the pda followed their own paths; the two sometimes intersected, but their agendas were nonetheless distinct. They were two separate threads that should not be artificially knotted. The same applies, of course, to the éS; all the more so, since between 1948 and 1953, the young Turks only rarely contributed to the 1951-founded *CC*. Joubert-Laurencin's demonstration, however, is only one of the two reasons why I do not think that my choice to leave Bazin out of this book's scope requires justification. The other is, quite simply, that previous claims about some allegedly substantial connection between the éS/pda and Bazin were automatically taken for granted and left unjustified. Even one of the most convincing attempts to highlight an affinity between Bazin and Rohmer, by Tom Gunning, is obliged to dwell on a number of differences separating them: Bazin draws upon the indexical properties of the photographic image while Rohmer does not;[31] Bazin's emphasis is on space while Rohmer's is on time and movement;[32] even cinema's 'inhuman' and mechanical character is differently formulated in their two cases.[33] The only conspicuous similarity traced by Gunning is *the dialectical character* of both Bazin's and Rohmer's notions of realism;[34] however, such character is merely a *structural* property and, as such, is undetermined. That is to say,

30 Joubert-Laurencin, 'Bazin contre la politique des auteurs'.
31 Gunning, 'Eric Rohmer and the Legacy of Cinematic Realism', p. 27.
32 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
33 *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.
34 *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

the fact that both notions of realism are dialectical does not mean that they necessarily coincide: they are, so Gunning seems to imply, *different* kinds of realism that, nonetheless, share a dialectical character.

Rohmer himself, in his eulogy to Bazin shortly after his death, wrote that his colleague knew perfectly well that 'Cinema's true nature is contradictory. One can enter his temple only by the door of paradox.'[35] And, in the last paragraph of the same piece (tellingly mentioning, in passing, that 'Sartre's influence was, as he said, a decisive factor in his career. We can admire the disciple's subsequent independence from his teacher'[36]), he acknowledged the gulf that ultimately separated Bazin from the pda.

> We, at *Cahiers*, who had almost daily colloquia with him, believed ourselves exempt from returning to his writings. If not for this, we might not have dared to restate what he had already definitively stated or to contradict him at times, forgetting that he had already answered our objections. Besides, we have all taken the lower road of polemics and frivolities, leaving him to tackle and answer the main question, What is cinema?[37]

Indeed, Godard admitted that he only rarely had significant exchanges with Bazin.[38] Indeed, by reading his writings, one realizes that he started to refer to him in positive terms only after his death.[39] Prior to this, the editor-in-chief of *CC* was, for him, little more than a polemical target.[40] As for Truffaut, all biographical sources confirm a certain closeness between the two *at a personal level*, but any random selection from their writings would unquestionably confirm how different their styles, analytical methods and cinematic tastes were. More importantly, a precious indication on the distance between Bazin and the éS/pda is implicitly contained in Rohmer's aforementioned eulogy, insofar as the portrait he draws of Bazin is somewhat *Kantianized*. The German philosopher is famously said to have brought about a Copernican revolution in modern philosophy, and to have greatly fostered the rise of modern science by having clearly traced out the limits of metaphysics. Likewise, 'Bazin makes a Copernican revolution in cinema theory,'[41] in that he

35 Rohmer, 'André Bazin's *summa*', p. 100.
36 *Ibid.*, p. 97.
37 *Ibid.*, p. 105.
38 Godard, 'L'art à partir de la vie [Interview with Alain Bergala]', p. 10.
39 For instance, in Godard, 'Take Your Own Tours'.
40 For instance, in Godard, 'Montage, my Fine Care' and 'Bergmanorama'.
41 Rohmer, 'André Bazin's *summa*', p. 97.

is the first to conceive of cinema theory in scientific *and metaphysical* terms. What Rohmer most appreciates is 'the scientific aspect of his work,'[42] the fact that his method 'gives life to critical "entities", just as the mathematician gives life to numbers or theorems. So many categories were opened to our inspection, thanks to him, beginning with that of ontology (the concept, not the term) which was absolutely disregarded by theoreticians before 1940!'[43] In other words, 'Bazin's work is centred on one idea, the affirmation of cinematic "objectivity", but it does so in the same way that geometry centres on the properties of the straight line.'[44] In a Kantian vein, knowledge cannot be *only* empirical; knowledge is only possible on the basis of the limits of knowledge, and this is precisely where metaphysics enters the frame.

> Before Bazin, the theory of cinema had used only a model drawn from the experimental sciences, and because it was unable to achieve the same precision, it remained empirical. It noted the existence of certain facts – especially the uses of language, close-ups, and editing – without being able to give us the reasons for them. Bazin introduced a new *metaphysical* dimension (we can use the word, as he did so himself, though at the same time he was careful not to play the philosopher) or, if one prefers, a *phenomenological* approach.[45]

In other words, Rohmer commended Bazin's balance between the rigour with which he deducted everything from his central 'objectivity-axiom', and the attention he devoted to the empirical data and circumstances abundantly and factually supplied by films; not incidentally, Kant is reputed precisely to have reached the squaring of the circle with regard to the combination of a priori knowledge with empiricism. It is also telling that Rohmer not only highlighted the systematic character of Bazin's film criticism,[46] but also used *architectonic metaphors* to account for his systematicity.

> Each time a new work came out – and recently there have been many – I noted with continual bitterness that however honest or intelligent

42 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
43 *Ibid.*
44 *Ibid.*
45 *Ibid.*, p. 97.
46 He claimed (p. 95) that the articles he gathered for his anthology 'were part of the development of a methodical outline that is now beginning apparent. And there is no doubt that they are part of an *outline* established beforehand and not of an argument assembled after the fact,' but there is no evidence whatsoever in support of his claim.

> it was, that although it brought a new block to the building of cinema's theory, it was practically useless, as the framework was missing. The aisles and side chapels of an aesthetics under construction sat proudly in bookstore windows, while the blueprints for the nave were confined to the newspaper! [...] I am certain of one thing: they [the articles gathered in Bazin's anthology] are not collections of notes or outlines. Although it may not be crowned by a roof, this edifice has a solid foundation. Not only is the structure there, but also the walls are in place, some of them have been there for a long time.[47]

Again, not incidentally, Kant's own philosophical system was, notoriously, conceived from the start by its own author as architectonic.

Even leaving aside other marginal, occasional Kantian undertones ('[...] the kind of primordiality that Bazin accorded the universe of ends over causes [...]' [48]), all of the above goes a long way towards accounting for the fact that Rohmer's polestar was less Bazin than Kant. He only referred to him on a few occasions before his death, and even in his funerary eulogy he portrays a 'Kantian' Bazin that probably never existed: it is not necessary to read all of the 2,600 articles Bazin wrote between 1943 and 1958 to realize that he was far less a systematic thinker than Rohmer suggested. More generally, Bazin's influence over the éS/pda cannot be said to be substantial, since a severe shortage of evidence undermines such a claim, while, as we shall see, Rohmer's influence over the éS (as well as Kantian transcendental idealism's over Rohmer) is very much apparent.

In conclusion, I would like to briefly address the possible usefulness of studying the éS in a contemporary context. I will only mention two reasons (which, of course, could be joined by several others): one is fairly obvious, while the other less so.

The first lies in the fact that in the mediascape we are all immersed in nowadays, the notion of authorship is undergoing a massive reconfiguration – think of, among others, User Generated Contents and fan fictions. As it is said, in order to seize the present, one has to understand the past; accordingly, in order to monitor this ongoing mutation, it might be helpful to reflect on the roots of the debate on cinematic authorship, namely, to the pda. However, the secret of the latter can only be disclosed via a correct comprehension of its 'incubation phase', i.e. the éS.

47 Rohmer, 'André Bazin's *summa*', pp. 93-94.
48 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

The less obvious reason is, as it were, a historiographical one. As a rule, the pda appears in most scholarly accounts as a mere footnote in the linear march of history leading to the advent of modern cinema, viz. the French New Wave. Commonly regarded as little more than a preparatory phase for a different, more personal and individualistic cinema to emerge, the pda is usually denied an autonomous status, a relevance in and of itself. What this evolutionary view overlooks is the paradox of the pda's position, one that ultimately undermines the evolutionary framework itself. The pda has been an overtly *conservative*, if not downright reactionary, trend in film criticism, very much attached to the past, to nineteenth-century literature and to patently outmoded (in the twentieth century) aesthetic criteria, such as the Romantic genius. Ironically, its place in film history textbooks is as a catalyst for cinema's progress toward modernity. It is my contention that whenever we are delivered some *irony of History*, we should treasure it for what it is, hold its aberration in great regard, and cautiously, receptively investigate it, rather than try to linearize it at all costs or jump too hastily to conclusions, because these ironies can teach us much about the irregular, discontinuous, unpredictable workings of History. And clearly, the paradox of the pda – its having gone down in History as an agent of progressive change, of going forward, while it had been deliberately looking backwards all along – is all the more apparent when accompanied by an in-depth understanding of the éS years, the incubation phase when Rohmer's conservativeness was at its most influential. In the late 1940s and in the early 1950s, the young Turks received, mostly from Rohmer, a decisive imprint; in accordance with Rohmer's own biases, it was an ostensibly conservative one. By taking this aspect into account, the paradoxical nature of the pda's (as well as the New Wave's) historical role stands out all the more.

In 1949, Rohmer had himself expelled from the editorial staff of *Les Temps modernes*, the prestigious journal run by Jean-Paul Sartre, because he wrote a statement that, with hindsight, appears to encapsulate the whole of the pda's (as well as the New Wave's) eventual journey: 'Since it is agreed to swear only by History, let's say that at a certain period of the evolution of the arts, the values of conservation should perhaps take over those of revolution or progress.'[49]

49 Rohmer, 'Le Festival du film maudit', p. 765. Originally: 'Puisqu'il est convenu de ne jurer que par l'Histoire, disons qu'à certains moments de l'évolution des arts, les valeurs de conservation méritent peut-être de prendre le pas sur celles de révolution ou de progrès.'

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Abbreviations

CC = *Cahiers du Cinéma*
éS = *école Schérer*
GoG = Tom Milne (ed. and trans.), *Godard on Godard*. London and New York: Da Capo, 1972.
pda = *politique des auteurs*
ToB = Jean Narboni and Eric Rohmer (eds), *The Taste of Beauty, trans*. by Carol Volk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

1. A Novelistic Art of Space

Grosoli, Marco, *Eric Rohmer's Film Theory (1948-1953). From 'école Schérer' to 'Politique des auteurs'*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

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Abstract
The main focus of this chapter is a close analysis of 'Cinema, an Art of Space', the first article about films that Eric Rohmer ever published, in 1948. In this article, Rohmer laid the foundations of his theoretical approach to cinema, grounded essentially on the aesthetic distinction between cinema and literature, and on the premise that cinema, thanks to its mechanical reproduction of the appearances of empirical reality, is more novelistic than the novel itself. His argument rests upon a binary opposition between ontology and language, in turn, overlapping other conceptual oppositions, such as space vs. time, showing vs. telling and cinema vs. literature. Because, at that time, Rohmer was still heavily influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre, the latter's ontology is also expounded at some length.

Keywords: Rohmer, Sartre, space, ontology

Although both designate the same group of people (Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, François Truffaut, plus a few occasional – and distinctly more inconspicuous – travel buddies), *école Schérer* (éS) and *politique des auteurs* (pda) are separated by a striking difference: the former includes the name 'Schérer' in it. When Pierre Kast invented the *école Schérer* label, in 1952, he was careful to come up with a nickname that made clear that that group had a leader: Eric Rohmer (Maurice Schérer was given name). The internal leadership was certainly more blurred in the pda years, roughly between 1954 and 1960, but in the late 1940s and in the early 1950s, as already mentioned in the Introduction to the present volume, this circle was deeply marked by Rohmer's view of cinema.

In order to unpack what that view was about, it should be made clear immediately that young Rohmer was primarily a man of letters. A high school teacher, in 1946, he published a novel, *Elizabeth*, whose over-descriptive style ostensibly treasured the lesson in objectivity delivered by those

contemporary American novels admired so much by French intellectuals of that era. Both as a literary author and as a literary scholar, Rohmer ultimately subscribed to the widespread view at that time, according to which, the best and most vital novels (i.e. those coming from the United States) impersonally *showed* more than they *told*.

Back then, his thoughts on cinema were less driven by theoretical issues per se, than by the intent to situate cinema in relation to literature. Indeed, by the time that Rohmer started to write about cinema, his ideas on the subject were already fairly clear: they were not exactly theoretical ideas, they rather concerned the relationship between cinema and literature. It can be argued that his take on this relationship drove and determined his theoretical positioning, not the other way around. In short, Rohmer was, above all, convinced that cinema was not just inherently novelistic, but *more novelistic than the novel itself*, because, by its very nature, it complies with the literary ideal 'to show and not to tell'[1] better than novels could.

Indeed, the very traditional opposition 'showing vs. telling' occupies a central place in Rohmer's literary and cinematic aesthetics. It can be argued that what fundamentally underlies Rohmer's theory of cinema from the outset is a daring and conceptually dangerous conflation between three binary oppositions: *showing vs. telling*, *ontology vs. language*, *space vs. time*. In order to properly understand Rohmer's view of cinema, one must venture into the indissoluble connections that he (for the most part, implicitly) posited between these elements – which are clearly not necessarily coincident with one another.[2]

Jean-Paul Sartre's literary aesthetics and philosophy are not at all foreign to such a conflation. Rohmer never concealed that Sartre (along with the phenomenological strand ensuing from Husserl's philosophy) was a conspicuous influence on him, especially in his youth.[3] This was due particularly to Alexandre Astruc (1923-2016), a young, brilliant writer (and

1 Rohmer, 'The Classical Age of Film', p. 42.

2 To be sure, the idea that cinema answers literature's dilemma between 'showing' and 'telling' has already been elaborated on (not least by referring to the space/time dichotomy) by a long-standing and extremely poignant tradition in Film Studies. Rohmer's case, however, is somewhat eccentric, in that it is complicated by the ambiguous presence of ontology within his framework. For this reason, a serious, systematic attempt to put Rohmer in the context of the reflections (by, say, André Gaudreault, Tom Gunning or other scholars who have studies this topic) about the way cinema has dealt with the showing/telling divide would require an extended study in its own right. Hence, the present chapter is content to follow the thread of Rohmer's (mostly implicit) assumptions alone, postponing to some other occasion the task of contextualizing them within the wealth of other voices who have tackled this issue.

3 De Baecque and Herpe, *Eric Rohmer*, pp. 35-36.

future filmmaker) whom he met in 1945, and who introduced him to the vibrant, existentialist environment of post-war Paris.[4] It is safe to assume that ideological incompatibilities played a part in Rohmer's short-lived participation to that trend, whose left-wing orientation arguably clashed somewhat with his notorious right-wing leaning. Tellingly, his guide through the microcosm of the St. Germain-des-près world, Astruc, was someone who (even in those days) always had a clear penchant for the right, as his autobiography unquestionably confirms.[5]

In effect, while Rohmer conflated showing vs. telling, ontology vs. language, and space vs. time, partly under the impulse of that leading intellectual figure of post-war France, that selfsame conflation ultimately caused the critic to *depart* from the renowned philosopher. That is to say, precisely in the aftermath of that conflation, Rohmer realized that his ideas on literature and cinema were incompatible with Sartre's perspective. Only in 1950, when he 'converted' while watching *Stromboli*, did he find a theoretical framework that suited them better: Immanuel Kant's philosophy.

The reach of that conversion away from Sartrean existentialism cannot be overestimated. If ever there was one, original phenomenon that can be retrospectively said to have eventually given rise to the pda, it was Rohmer's detachment from his Sartrean-existentialist background, the 'big bang' that the critic himself (as we shall see in a subsequent chapter) dated to 1950, right in the middle of the éS years.

It is thus necessary to briefly recapitulate what this original Sartrean-existentialist background was about, albeit sketchily. While our principal guide will be *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre's main ontological treatise, it is important to bear in mind that the stakes here are inseparably philosophical, ethical and aesthetic.

1.1. Sartre's ontology

It must be recalled, firstly, that *Being and Nothingness* develops the premises of an earlier essay, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, that attempts to rethink Descartes' cogito in light of (itself revisited) Husserlian phenomenology. 'I think, therefore I am' needs to be supplemented with the awareness that 'the consciousness that says "I think" is precisely not the consciousness that

4 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
5 Astruc, *Le montreur d'ombres*, p. 154.

thinks'[6] (or, as Rimbaud once put it, 'je est un autre', 'I is an other').[7] The latter, a 'transcendental consciousness', is an 'impersonal spontaneity'[8] that 'determines itself to exist at every instant, without us being able to conceive of anything before it. Thus every instant of our conscious lives reveals to us a creation ex nihilo. Not a new arrangement but a new existence.'[9] It is the flow of every phenomena being presented to consciousness; not a purely formal structure of consciousness like for Kant and Husserl, but always 'an infinite contraction of the material *me*.'[10] This 'me' occurs the moment the impersonal spontaneity gets personal, viz. when transcendental consciousness is reflected onto itself. The 'me' can do nothing to master the spontaneity of the transcendental consciousness, 'since the will is an object that is constituted for and by this spontaneity.'[11] More precisely:

> there is an unreflected act of reflection without I which is aimed at a reflected consciousness. This reflected consciousness becomes the object of the reflecting consciousness, without, however, ceasing to affirm its own object (a chair, a mathematical truth, etc). At the same time a new object appears which is the occasion for an affirmation of the reflective consciousness and is in consequence neither on the same level as unreflected consciousness (because the latter is an absolute that has no need of reflective consciousness in order to exist), nor on the same level as the object of the unreflected consciousness (chair, etc.). This transcendent object of the reflective act is the I.[12]

The Ego is nothing but the product of this reflection, the transcendent 'unity of states and actions'[13] of a single consciousness ('A consciousness can conceive of no other consciousness than itself').[14] 'The Ego is not the proprietor of consciousness, it is its object. To be sure, we spontaneously constitute our states and our actions as productions of the Ego. But our states and actions are also objects. We never have any direct intuition of the spontaneity of an instantaneous consciousness as produced by the

6 Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, p. 6.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
9 *Ibid.*
10 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
12 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
13 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Ego,'[15] because the essential role of the Ego is, on the contrary, 'to mask from consciousness its own spontaneity.'[16] It is 'limited to reflecting an ideal unity, whereas real, concrete unity has long been achieved'[17] in the guise of impersonal, undifferentiated spontaneity.

It is against this background that one should conceive the slightly distinct dichotomy being-in-itself/being-for-itself, in *Being and Nothingness*. 'It is the non-reflective consciousness which renders the reflection possible; there is a pre-reflective cogito which is the condition of the Cartesian cogito.'[18] Conscious being (for-itself) emerges out of the unconscious (that is, non-reflective, in-itself) being reflected onto itself, it being understood that these two dimensions are intimately connected, as 'every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself.'[19] The (unconscious, in-itself) consciousness I have of a chair, is, to a degree, simultaneously a (reflected, for-itself) consciousness of my consciousness of the chair. This reflection is also a *nihilation*. Why? Because being-in-itself is nothing, and the 'something' emerging through the for-itself is a nihilation of that nothingness. It is that very nothingness, reflected onto itself. 'Nothingness can nihilate itself only on the foundation of being; if nothingness can be given, it is neither before nor after being, nor in a general way outside of being. Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being-like a worm.'[20] This is why nihilation and transcendence have to be thought together: (for-itself) consciousness is able to transcend being in-itself only by means of nihilation, i.e. by bringing forth the nothingness at the very core of the in-itself. Nihilation is thus not only a detachment, but also a kind of intimate fidelity.

With nihilation, for-itself consciousness emerges. In a strongly Heideggerian vein (Heidegger is notoriously one of the main influences behind *Being and Nothingness*), the emergence of the subject (that is, of the for-itself consciousness) is inseparable from the emergence of temporality. The subject is essentially that by which temporality emerges.

> Temporality is not a universal time containing all beings and in particular human realities. Neither is it a law of development which is imposed on being from without. Nor is it being. But it is the intra-structure of the

15 *Ibid.*
16 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
17 *Ibid.*
18 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. liii.
19 *Ibid.*
20 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

> being which is its own nihilation-that is, the mode of being peculiar to being-for-itself. The For-itself is the being which has to be its being in the diasporatic form of Temporality.[21]

As soon as it transcends the in-itself by means of nihilation, thereby acquiring self-consistency, for-itself consciousness accesses *freedom*. Freedom is self-grounded (i.e. *groundless*) and contingent: it has no other ground but the arbitrary positing of its own emergence – hence its contingency (if it is groundless, it cannot be necessary). Crucially, freedom can exist only through temporality ('the for-itself cannot be except in temporal form'[22]), that is, *as a project*: freedom consists of opening up the possibility of future action, oriented towards a goal, while, by the same token, establishing a relatively self-determined past from which action takes off. Sartre's freedom consists primarily of 'uprooting oneself' from the thick texture of causes and effects whereby one is determined. 'Nihilation' is precisely such an act, and it always coincides with the temporalization of one's freedom; that is, with a fundamental project that articulates, together, a past (the posited causes of one's project), a present (the self-deliberated motives pushing one to act in a certain way) and a future (the goals to which the project is aimed).[23] What should be stressed is that Sartre's freedom, in accordance with the way temporality itself is, is *groundless, and contingent*. Its only ground is arbitrarily posited by the for-itself consciousness, and its arbitrariness is the necessary condition of said temporalization. It is the mere fact of always being one step ahead of the causes behind one's back, in such a way that one *never* coincides with the mere product of those causes.

> Indeed by the sole fact that I am conscious of the causes which inspire my action, these causes are already transcendent objects for my consciousness; they are outside. In vain shall I seek to catch hold of them; I escape them by my very existence. I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the causes and motives of my act. I am condemned to be free. This means that no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free.[24]

21 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
22 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
23 Regarding the 'cause-motive-end' triad, see Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 449.
24 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 439.

By the same token, freedom needs this texture of causes and effects in order to impose itself as difference. In other, more Sartrean words, it needs a *situation* to uproot from. It is 'the paradox of freedom: there is freedom only in a situation, and there is a situation only through freedom.'[25]

1.2. A novelistic ontology?

This conception of (for-itself, subjective) consciousness, temporality and freedom heavily informed Sartre's immensely influential (at least in mid-century France) theory of literature, as shown in many of his writings, particularly those gathered in his *Situations I* collection.

It is easy to see how the kind of consciousness outlined in *Being and Nothingness* lends itself particularly well to being regarded as novelistic. The (unconscious, in-itself) consciousness I have of a chair, is, to a degree, simultaneously a (reflected, for-itself) consciousness of my consciousness of the chair: consciousness is always already self-consciousness, and lies in my being conscious of the chair *as well as* in my being conscious of *myself* being conscious of it. From this twofold arrangement binding consciousness to self-consciousness, it is but a short step to the kind of consciousness implied in novels: that to which the appearances of an imaginary world consistently unfurling through time are presented, *plus* some *individuated* consciousness adding its own variously interpreting agency to them – particularly by arranging their temporal unfolding in a particular, idiosyncratic, contingent, ultimately subjective way. This individuated consciousness, like for-itself consciousness, is a contingent, temporalizing agency that cannot be regarded as 'a thing', or even a 'something', but rather as a nothingness nestled in in the sheer, 'non-reflected' unfolding of phenomena being presented to consciousness. To be sure, this individuated, for-itself consciousness is the one distinguishing the narrator, but not exclusively so: all consciousnesses variously involved in the writing and the reading processes (the writer's, the reader's, the characters' and the like) are for-itself consciousness, and all of them mutually communicate and interact in the space that the novel opens up.[26]

Typically, for Sartre, Dos Passos' or Faulkner's jumbled temporal structures, strongly diverging from the uniform flow of chronology, display precisely the inherent contingency of this reflective consciousness qua

25 *Ibid.*, p. 489.
26 See especially Sartre's *What is literature?*

temporalizing agency. Therein, the groundless irruption of the present, as well as the weight of the past, do not lend themselves to any straight past-present-future kind of articulation, and those warped, inherently idiosyncratic temporalizations are, as it were, each time attached to some individuated reflective consciousness (again: the narrator's, the reader's, a character's, etc.). This feature is elaborated upon, for instance, by Jean Pouillon in his *Temps et roman*, one of the many critical works that not only abundantly quoted Sartre, but also modelled their conception of the novel after his ontology. According to this perspective, the peculiar temporality of the novel does not merely follow the unfolding of narrative action, but also gives shape to the strictly *contingent* temporality projected and experienced by for-itself consciousness (that of the character/narrator as well as that of the reader, as they are constantly in touch during the reading process). 'Events follow one another without necessarily determining one another,'[27] because they are filtered through the for-itself consciousness, which can only conceive a contingent, quintessentially human kind of temporality: one in which the single moments in time relate together thanks to an articulation that can never coincide with a steady, unambiguous, objective kind of time.

> It seems Faulkner's worldview can be compared to that of a man sitting in an open-topped car and looking backwards. At each moment, formless shadows rear up to right and left; flickerings, subdued vibrations, wisps of light, which only become trees, people and cars a little later, as they recede into the distance. The past acquires a sort of surreality in this: its outlines become crisp and hard – changeless. The present, nameless and fleeting, suffers greatly by comparison; it is full of holes and, through these holes, it is invaded by things past, which are fixed, still and silent, like judges or stares. Faulkner's monologues are reminiscent of aeroplane journeys with lots of air pockets. With each new pocket, the hero's consciousness sinks back into the past, rises and then sinks again. The present *is* not; it becomes; everything *was*.[28]

According to Sartre's perspective, the contingency of (inseparably) freedom, subjectivity and temporality also entails their inescapable *situatedness*. No freedom, no temporality, no consciousness without a concrete situation. This is why one should not regard the primacy of consciousness (as the agent of

27 Pouillon, *Temps et roman*, p. 26. Originally: 'Les événements se suivent sans qu'ils se déterminent nécessairement'.

28 Sartre, 'Temporality in Faulkner', pp. 109-110.

temporalization whereby the novel unfolds) in simply psychological terms. What is at stake is much less the psychological depiction of a consciousness than that consciousness *qua situated* in the world. Accordingly, in novels, consciousness is the nothingness adding itself to the seemingly transparent, 'realist' deployment of the appearances of a world. This means that the emphasis is primarily on the literary depiction of *sheer appearances* unfurling over time; that is, filtered by the contingent, groundless temporality of that nothingness known as (all too human) for-itself consciousness. Every conscious perception (the perceiver perceives *something*) is accompanied by the consciousness of that consciousness, i.e. by a reflective self-consciousness (*the perceiver* perceives something) that is ultimately a nothingness. The novel revolves around the contingent temporality of for-itself consciousness, but the latter, because it 'is nothing', only matters insofar as it is that by which appearances appear over time. This is where time and space, the inside and the outside, display their bond.

> We are neither mechanisms, nor possessed souls, but something worse: we are free. Entirely outside or entirely inside. Dos Passos' human is a hybrid, internal-external creature. We are with him and in him. We live with his vacillating individual consciousness and, suddenly, it falters, weakens and flows off into the collective consciousness. We follow him and suddenly, here we are, outside, without having noticed it.[29]

Thus, for Sartre, the quintessential kind of novel can only be a contemporary American novel, because it is *impersonal*, primarily devoted to the literary depiction of non-psychological perceptual flagrancy of the appearances of empirical reality as they emerge and unfurl over time, unencumbered by consciousness insofar as they are filtered by a consciousness that 'is nothing' (but a contingent, temporalizing agency). This is also why this kind of novel can easily be deemed *cinematic*. In this respect, it is particularly useful to refer to Claude-Edmonde Magny's *The Age of the American Novel*, arguably the most representative sample of the several mid-twentieth-century existentialism-inflected attempts to articulate together Sartre's philosophy, the novel (most notably the American novel) and the cinema.

According to Magny, cinema and the American novel are inherently close. They both try to stick as closely as possible to ordinary human visual perception: they are both, as it were, after a certain objectivity of the depth-less,

29 Sartre, 'On John Dos Passos and *1919*', pp. 28-29.

psychology-less perceptual/visual exterior surface.[30] In short, they are both after the *naked fact*, unencumbered by any interpretation of commentary, the way it normally appears to human eyes. Behaviourism is an obvious case in point, since it can be

> defined by its assumption that the psychological reality of a person or an animal is limited to what can be perceived by a purely external observer (exemplified in its extreme form by its camera lens) and that everything only the subject himself can know, through self-analysis, must be eliminated. In short, psychological reality is to be reduced to a succession of acts, with words or cries having the same weight as gestures or expressions.[31]

Who came first? The cinema or the novel? The answer is particularly relevant.

> The novel thus appears to be much less an art of language than we might a priori have expected it to be. Its aim is to show rather than to say, and it is therefore related to the cinema even when it is not in the least influenced by it. The great lesson the American novel learned from the movies – that the less one says the better, that the most striking artistic effects are those born of the juxtaposition of two images, without any commentary, and that the novel, no more than any other, should not say too much – was very well understood by Hemingway, Faulkner, and Steinbeck. But Stendhal, Balzac, and the naturalists had anticipated it: long before the twentieth century, they had already invented the journalistic novel.[32]

Ultimately, the novel came first: not the American novel though, but the French realist/naturalist novel of the nineteenth century, pushing both the twentieth-century American novel and cinema to influence one another in its wake. 'The introduction into the novel of changes in perspective analogous to those of the cinema was made necessary by the vast inner transformation of the novel, a transformation that began with Zola and continues today, especially in the United States.'[33] This priority enjoyed by the novel is not only historical, but also aesthetic: the objectivity shared

30 Magny, *The Age of the American novel*, p. 39.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 40.
32 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
33 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

by films and novels is ultimately *a matter of techniques*. 'Techniques' here can be defined as all forms of manipulation of the novel's temporality (like ellipses, or a floating point of view) liable to be ascribed to a definite consciousness (the novelist's and/or the narrator's and/or the character's/s', etc.). It can be argued that they correspond to 'narration' in the classical 'narrative/narration' divide, where narrative is 'a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in space and time,'[34] while narration is 'the activity of selecting, arranging and rendering story material in order to achieve specific time-bound effects on the perceiver.'[35] Because it is a matter of expressive intentionality (by means of the perturbations of the temporal sequence, some consciousness finds expression), the objectivity at stake here is still a matter of language; hence, it belongs to the field of literature inevitably more than it does to that of cinema. Cinema uses 'a whole new arsenal of extremely efficacious techniques, some of which, of course, had been used long before the invention of the film – though more timidly and less systematically – by Balzac, Stendhal, or the naturalists.'[36] For Magny, when cinema wishes to be objective, it has to stick to expressive devices (ellipses, changes in point of view, etc.) – which means that the domain of language (and thus literature) is never very far. Even when literature tries to borrow expressive devices from cinema, it is still, essentially, a matter of techniques, so the 'instrumental' privilege of literature, the domain of language, remains intact.

In his 'American Novelists in French Eyes', Sartre wrote:

> For a long time we have been using certain techniques to make our readers understand what was going on in the souls of our characters. [...] The American writers freed us from these obsolete techniques. Hemingway never enters inside his characters [...]. He describes him always from the outside. He is only the witness of their conduct. It is from their conduct that we must, as in life, reconstruct their thought. He does not admit that the writer has the power to lift the tops of their skulls as the Club-footed Devil raised the roofs of houses to see what went on inside. We have to wait with him – page after page – to understand the actors in the drama. We are, as he pretends to be, reduced to conjectures.[37]

34 Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, p. 60.
35 Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. xi.
36 Magny, *The Age of the American novel*, p. 47.
37 Sartre, 'American Novelists in French Eyes', p. 117.

However, in the same article, Sartre also makes clear that with the advent of contemporary American novels, techniques are not simply dispensed with once and for all: they are simply *replaced* by newer and better techniques (typically, in Faulkner's case, a jumbled temporal order).

> In other words, the influence of American novels has produced a *technical* revolution among us. They have placed in our hands new and supple instruments, which allow us to approach subjects which heretofore we had no means of treating: the unconscious; sociological events; the true relation of the individual to society, present or past. [...] These American novelists, without such traditions, without help, have forged, with barbaric brutality, tools of inestimable value.[38]

These novelists do not try to penetrate the inner dimension of the characters, they just look for it on their outside. Nevertheless, it is again a strictly technical matter: what enables the inspection of that outside are, again, literary techniques. Accordingly, Magny could only conceive a relation of equivalence between cinema and the contemporary American novel in terms of equivalence *of techniques*.

1.3. Cinema: Novelistic consciousness qua actual nothingness

When Rohmer reviewed Magny's *The Age of the American Novel* in *Les Temps modernes* (Sartre's own organ) in March 1949, he had mixed feelings about it. As long as he recapitulated the main features of the American novel the way Magny (and Sartre) identified them, no serious objections were raised. This included the stigmatization of plot and dramaturgy as opposed to a sense of 'pure event' and of 'situation', the preponderance of the present instant to the detriment of the future, the lack of customary psychological determinations (whereby man could presume to dominate time), and so on and so forth.[39]

Problems arose when cinema came along.

> Both arts have completely different ways of representing their relation to an object: that which becomes an absolute necessity for one – to express the interior by the exterior, the thought by the behaviour – is, for the

38 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

39 Rohmer, 'L'âge du roman américain', pp. 563-564.

> other, a matter of convention. I don't think that the deep nature of cinema can be defined as an 'art of ellipsis' or that its function is to make itself comprehensible by sparing the spectator the 'lengthy speech'. Instead, cinema establishes between the spectator and the visible world a mode of understanding, whose specificity is guaranteed by this very exterior viewpoint the spectator is forced to adopt.[40]

Rohmer opposed literature's inside-outside dynamics to cinema's absolute exteriority. What is at stake here is no less than the interrelation itself between Sartre's philosophical stance on self-reflection (self-consciousness) and the philosopher's novelistic aesthetics. Rohmer was well aware that the novel (as theorized by Sartre, Magny, Pouillon and the like) seeks a certain absence of consciousness, in the guise of a reflective, de-psychologized consciousness, which 'is nothing' but a contingent, temporalizing agency whereby the appearances of the imaginary world of the novel consistently unfurl in time. At the same time, Rohmer seemed to suggest that this novelistic for-itself consciousness *is not nothing enough*.

In his opinion, cinema gave rise to a consciousness that is truly and indeed a nothingness, one that is characterized primarily by a lack of any definite consciousness, including the literary and Sartrean kind of consciousness that is nothing, but which nonetheless temporalizes. Indeed, Rohmer seemed to subscribe to the then relatively widespread (one need only think of such 1920s French film theorists and critics as, among others, Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein – to say nothing of André Bazin himself) theoretical leaning regarding cinema, above all, as a machine; accordingly, cinematic consciousness, viz. that which enables moving images to appear on a screen, is supposed to essentially consist of a mechanic spatialization of time, as opposed to the contingent temporalizations characterizing the 'literary' individuated consciousnesses of the Sartrean variety. It is necessity as opposed to contingency: cinema can *only* (that is, necessarily) rely on that which is external, because it has no inner side, and the only temporal dimension it can access is mechanically spatialized (that is to say, it becomes spatialized thanks to a process ruled by the necessity characterizing every mechanic unfolding).

40 *Ibid.*, p. 565. Originally: 'Les deux arts nous révèlent des rapports entièrement différents entre l'objet et son mode de représentation: ce qui est nécessité absolue dans l'un – exprimer l'intérieur par l'extérieur, la pensée par le comportement – n'est plus chez l'autre que convention. [...] Je ne crois pas que sa [cinema's] nature profonde soit d'être un 'art de l'ellipse' ou d'une façon plus générale qu'il ait pour fonction d'habituer le spectateur à 'comprendre sans longues discours', mais d'établir entre celui-ci et le monde visible un mode de compréhension dont le caractère spécifique est garanti par l'extériorité même du point de vue qu'il l'oblige d'adopter'.

This, of course, is not to say that 'contingent' temporal arrangements (for instance, ellipses) cannot be attached to films (for instance, by a narrator imposing a deliberately jumbled or elliptical temporal structure for definite aesthetic purposes), but rather that even these techniques must be submitted to and cope with cinema's more original and primary mechanicity (there will be more on this assumption in the next chapter).

In a literary context, techniques can function as that *minimal* and essentially temporal presence of consciousness whereby consciousness can dissimulate its own absence. However, the advent of cinema has shown that these conventions artfully intertwining the inside (a temporalizing, individuated consciousness qua nothingness) and the outside (whatever is presented to consciousness) *can be done away with*: it 'retroactively' showed this novelistic reflective consciousness to be too cumbersome to really be the nothingness it aspires to be. By mechanically spatializing time and by embodying a completely exterior point of view devoid of subjectivity in the first place (although, of course, any kind and number of subjectivities can be variously added and attached to it *in the second place*), cinema does not strictly need individuated consciousnesses, or the contingent temporalizations they carry. It can thus dispense with techniques and writerly conventions, in that it stands for a radical lack of consciousness as opposed to the kind of consciousness that is nothing, but which, nonetheless, temporalizes contingently, implied in the Sartrean kind of self-reflection.

It thus seems that cinema, according to Rohmer, strikes a soft spot in the Sartrean conception of the novel (defended by, for instance, Magny and Pouillon). It shows that such a conception cannot help but violate its own premises, namely reify, substantialize and personalize a reflective consciousness supposed to be a mere nothingness, by bestowing upon it a temporalizing agency ultimately preventing it from actually being a nothingness. Clearly, this deadlock in Sartrean novelistic aesthetics corresponds as well to a deadlock in his own ontology, but, for the time being, Rohmer was not interested in discarding that theoretical/philosophical frame – only his 1950 'conversion' would push him to do so.

As a rule, when actions and descriptions are outlined in a novel, they are accompanied by some kind of (more or less implicit) self-consciousness as regards *whose* consciousness is outlining what is going on (the narrator's? A character's? Somebody else's?); cinema, by contrast, can easily stick to that outline *alone*, with no need to attach it to an individuated consciousness. Whereas Sartrean consciousness qua always already self-consciousness lies in my being conscious of the chair *as well as* in my being conscious of *myself* being conscious of it, cinema lacks the latter: it lacks an *individuated*,

contingent, temporalizing, reflective consciousness perceiving phenomena while asserting itself. The cinematic image of a chair embodies not only the consciousness of a chair, but also *nobody's* consciousness of a chair, because it is a consciousness stemming primarily from a machine. More precisely, in cinema, that reflective consciousness (qua distinguished from that which is consciousness of) is *actually* nothing: because cinema shows us nothing but the image of a chair, in cinema any possible kind of consciousness is entirely embedded in the image of the chair, and is nowhere to be found beside it. The cinematic image of a chair points at the disappearance of every non-positional (reflective, for-itself) consciousness of the consciousness of the chair, *in* the simply positional consciousness of the chair. This is why cinema should do without any literary techniques: they are meant to convey an individuated, contingent, temporalizing consciousness that cinema does not need, because every likewise reflective consciousness is potentially already encompassed and inscribed in the images and their impersonal unfolding in the first place.

The most obvious consequence of this 'disappearance' of for-itself, reflective consciousness is the fact that cinema and *language* (which is temporal by definition, and can in principle only be ascribed to a consciousness of that kind) are literally worlds apart. Rohmer's conception of cinema is marked by a strong anti-linguistic bias. Cinema is emphatically not a language; its nature is not at all linguistic. 'It is not certain that the purpose of cinema is to suggest, to evoke an absence from a given presence; rather, it is to ground the necessity of this presence when it comes to that which it is supposed to signify.'[41] With linguistic signs, some ideally preceding inner content is conveyed by a subsequent outside (the sign proper, resting upon the customary arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified), and then inferred in return from the latter. With moving images, the inside-outside relation is severed: there is only the outside. There is no inner meaning or being 'making it on the outside', but one that immediately *coincides* with the outside. The word 'chair' can suggest whatever chair, while the moving image of a chair only and *necessarily that* chair; as he wrote in a later article: 'we can see why reality would be useful here, its necessity coming from the contingency of its introduction into the film: it could not have been, but it can no longer help but be, now that it was'.[42] Of course, the

41 *Ibid*. Originally: 'Il n'est pas certain que son [cinema's] but soit de suggérer, d'évoquer une absence à partir d'une présence donnée; il serait plutôt de fonder la nécessité de cette présence en fonction de ce qu'elle doit signifier'.

42 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 46. This is why, in the third instalment of his essay in five parts 'Le celluloid et le marbre' ('III. De la métaphore'), he affirms that poetry has always

fact that the moving image of a chair points at that particular chair does not mean that it reproduces that chair 'as it really is', but only that the moving image of a chair, rather than expressing some definite way to represent a chair, shows a particular chair *virtually encompassing every potential and subsequent 'interpretation' attached to that particular chair*. In a sense, this is not without recalling later theories by Christian Metz, who argued that because the image is too closely related to the object which it represents, its meaning is fixed, and not arbitrary, as is the case with linguistic phonemes,[43] hence an insurmountable gap between cinema and language.[44]

A few months after Rohmer's review, Jacques Rivette put the same point in the following way:

> Film certainly is a language, and a profoundly signifying one. But it is a language composed, precisely, of concrete signs, which resist being reduced to formulas. It seems unnecessary to recall the unity of the frame, of the take: irremediable record of the instant. There lies the mistake of every literary approximation (grammars, syntaxes, morphologies) no matter how well intentioned. Invariably, systematization neglects, a priori, the complexity of sensible reality as it mounts its theoretical edifice. In this medium, it cannot have grammars, or rule-bound syntaxes, but only empirical routines, hasty generalizations. No shot can be fit to a formula that misses its rich complexity, the virtuality and power that, in their very confusion, are the reality of the shot's existence. [...] This is nothing at all like words, like abstract and conventional signs, which are organized according to stable rules. A shot always remains on the side of the accidental, of a momentary success that cannot be repeated. A sentence, conversely, can be rewritten at will.[45]

Rohmer and Magny agreed that the purpose of both cinema and novel is 'to show and not to tell',[46] but they ultimately meant something different. In the wake of Sartre's novelistic aesthetics, significantly ensuing from his philosophy of consciousness, Rohmer too believed that the gordian knot

been handicapped by the arbitrary character of linguistic signs, but cinema can give poetry a new life by complementing it with the *necessary* character of moving images.

43 Metz, *Film Language*, p. 93.

44 A gap that Metz tried to surmount nevertheless, in ways that fall beyond the scope of this book.

45 Rivette, 'Nous ne sommes plus innocents'. An English translation (from which all subsequent quotations will be taken) appeared in the issue 61 (2011) of *Senses of Cinema* online movie magazine: http://sensesofcinema.com/2011/feature-articles/we-are-not-innocent-anymore/.

46 Rohmer, 'The Classical Age of Film', p. 42.

between 'showing' and 'telling' could only be cut by ontology. But whereas Magny thought that, all things considered, cinema could only privilege the 'showing' by following in the footsteps of nineteenth century literature, Rohmer maintained that cinema had sealed the triumph of 'showing' over 'telling' by making the way for a *different* kind of ontology, one that broke with the 'novelistic', *chiefly temporal* ontology of *Being and Nothingness*'s for-itself consciousness. What Rohmer had in mind, in contrast with Sartre's perspective, was a *chiefly spatial* ontology *as opposed to* language; 'techniques', cherished by Magny and opposed by Rohmer, stood precisely for the linguistic representation of time cinema could and should dispense with. While for Magny 'to show' means 'to show by means of deliberate, expressive techniques', cinematic objectivity according to Rohmer cannot be a matter of techniques: it cannot be the outcome of any kind of (broadly intended) linguistic choice, however far from verbal language that which carries out an original intention might be, but of a spatiality inscribed in the DNA itself of the cinema medium, as opposed to the temporal bias language[47] carries along by its own nature. While the literary theories by Magny, Pouillon and the (Sartrean) like can only envision aesthetic depictions of outward appearance relying on a temporal interplay between narrative and narration, cinema, so Rohmer seemed to imply, is an innately external point of view on things; its eminently spatial externality, spatializing time rather than articulating it by way of the contingent temporalizations characterizing individuated consciousnesses, can do away with literature's dependence on linguistic, temporal techniques. Whereas in literature the 'showing' can only prevail by still being subordinated to the 'telling' (that is, by still relying on inescapably linguistic, time-based writerly techniques), in the cinema time is subordinated to space, and by the same token 'telling' (something essentially temporal) is more thoroughly subordinated to 'showing' (something essentially spatial) – as argued in 'Cinema, an Art of Space', the first article about films Eric Rohmer ever managed to publish (on the June 1948 issue of *La Revue du cinéma*).

1.4. An art of space

Cinema and the novel share the aesthetic goal of getting rid of any psychological depths, of anything exceeding the mere visual surface of things and

47 Including any form of *visual* language: a visual metaphor of, say, the Eizensteinian variety clearly relies on the *non-simultaneity* between the images that are metaphorically juxtaposed; hence these images cannot be arranged but temporally.

beings as it unfolds through time,[48] but they are inescapably separated by their *means*: one tries to achieve that through language, while the other does not. And to Rohmer, this made all the difference in the world. No matter how hard literature tries to adhere to the surface of phenomena, it is condemned to re-enact Sartre's revised cogito: an object is consciously perceived while that very consciousness is the object of a reflective for-itself consciousness, which, at the same time, is nothing; however, only cinema's mechanical eye can *indeed* be 'a nothing of consciousness', viz. wholly external and impersonal in the first place.[49] This also means that cinema is far less bound to for-itself consciousness's temporality than the novel is: it is an art of space. In Rohmer's review of Magny's book, however, this spatial bias is extended even to Faulkner's novels, right in the midst of a discussion on the essentially temporal nature of novels in general:

> What matters is that the language at issue proves its authenticity on the basis of the fact that each of the signs it employs relates to our overall way of apprehending objects according to a necessary relationship. From this perspective, the concept of time is the most indicative (still, the study of a sense of space in the chosen situations or metaphors should also appear in a phenomenology of Faulkner's art). Art of duration, the novelistic narrative only appears to bring forth the reality of the narrated moments through their integration into a temporal totality.[50]

The novel is a temporal art, but cinema is an art of space. It may well be that some of the greatest novelists (like Faulkner, or Hermann Melville) 'bent' the novel's temporality toward cinema's spatiality, but the difference remains.

48 'The contemporary novel (I include those of the last century) learned the art of making things almost as visible to us as if they were shown on a screen. Many of the things we have said about cinema and its specificity would almost apply to the novel'. Rohmer, 'Lesson of a Failure: *Moby Dick*', p. 107.

49 This is why he also said that the impersonal detachment *vrais romanciers* ('true novelists') have always looked for is to be found in cinema much more than in contemporary novels. See for instance Rohmer, 'I. Le bandit philosophe'.

50 Rohmer, 'L'âge du roman américain', p. 563. Originally: 'Il importe que le langage qui nous est ainsi proposé justifie son authenticité par la nécessité du rapport qu'entretient chacun des signes qu'il utilise avec les modes généraux de notre appréhension des objets. De ce point de vue, le concept de temps est le plus révélateur (encore que l'étude d'un sens de l'espace dans le choix des situations ou des métaphores dût également figurer dans une phénoménologie de l'art de Faulkner). Art de la durée, la narration romanesque ne semble pouvoir fonder la réalité de chacun des instants qu'elle retrace que par leur insertion dans une totalité temporelle'.

The novel's temporality depends on language, cinema's lies in the *spatial* deployment of a temporality, of a temporal sequence of moments and deeds.

Having said this, it should be immediately made clear that both share common ground. As said earlier, in literature the 'showing' can, according to Rohmer, only prevail by still being subordinated to the 'telling', while in the cinema time is subordinated to space, and by the same token 'telling' is more thoroughly subordinated to 'showing' – but these are clearly two sides of the same coin. The virtual, imaginary space being deployed by both cinema and novel is essentially a space-time.[51] In 'Cinema, an Art of Space', its title notwithstanding, the inseparability between space and time is very clear from the outset.[52] Films have no spatial dimension without its own temporal deployment, through a series of variously interconnected shots gradually composing an imaginary space. Here, Rohmer is very close

51 Needless to say, Eric Rohmer was not a naïve realist (neither was Bazin, for that matter). He did not believe that cinema can 'faithfully reproduce reality' (whatever this might mean). Several passages from his writings attest this obvious truth (despite many scholarly accounts on Rohmer and Bazin over the last few decades have affirmed the contrary). Even such an early article as 'Cinema, an Art of Space' is careful to make it clear. In a brief discussion of the difference between the plasticity of actors' gestures in theatrical space and in cinematic space (p. 21), Rohmer says that the screen does not reveal the 'natural' gestures of the actors, but *distorts* them, or at least encourages a certain type of gesture which is different from the theatre's but that is required, like theatre's, to comply with a certain need of plastic equilibrium that has nothing to do with 'the real gesture' (whatever that is) to be reproduced. The fact that this equilibrium is differently achieved in theatre and in cinema does not prevent the necessity for some 'non-realist' (but rather plastic) equilibrium to exist in both cases in the first place. Thus, the spatial bias of cinema does not derive from an alleged capability to reproduce the space of empirical reality 'the way it is'; it rather has to do with the potential deployment of a spatiality inherent in the cinema *medium*.

52 'You have to be careful about space. The cinematic being reveals himself in space as well as in time. To tell the truth, he reveals himself in space-time, since in film one cannot dissociate one from the other.' Rohmer, 'The Critical Years', p. 11. The irreplaceable importance of time in this 'art of space' is corroborated by the abundance of *musical* metaphors in Rohmer's film reviews, like for instance: '… because after the *fortissimi* and the *prestissimi* of the preceding passage, the film, in which the soul's effervescence always finds lyrical expression, requires a slower, more muffled movement, just as in a symphony the andante follows the allegro' ('Ingmar Bergman's *Dreams*', p. 166); Nicholas Ray's 'tempo is slow, his melody usually monochord' ('Ajax or the Cid?', p. 111); 'The harmony that can be heard in this film has nothing of the soft purring of ordinary rhetoric. Its melody is hardly one of those which can be hummed on the way out. It requires a certain effort to be in tune with its rhythm, and, even so, the most warned spirit is forced to sense its internal logic' ('Amère victoire'); originally: 'Ce film fait entendre une harmonie qui n'a pas le ronron ouaté des rhetoriques ordinaires. Sa mélodie n'est pas de celles que l'on frédonne à la sortie. Il faut un effort certain pour s'accorder à son rythme, et, pourtant, l'esprit le plus prévenu, est forcé d'en pressentir la logique interne'. Other similar metaphors can be found in (among others) 'Rue de la honte'; 'L'esclave libre'; 'Les feux de l'été'.

to André Bazin,[53] who defined cinematic space as 'centrifugal', as opposed to theatre's 'centripetal' one: whereas the former primarily extends *beyond* the four edges of the frame ('the screen reveals a space that is not closed but is spilling over on all sides, like a landscape from a window or a room from a keyhole'[54]), the latter is entirely contained *within* the stage area. 'Compared with theatrical space, cinematic space would thus be defined by the narrowness of its visual surface and by the breadth of its place of action. The director must therefore determine not only the interior of each shot according to a certain spatial concept but also the total space to be filmed: the coming and going of the train in Buster Keaton's *The General* depicts a very precise spatial obsession.'[55] Time (the unfolding of a series of shots) is precisely what bridges 'the interior of each shot' with 'the total space to be filmed', and for this reason it is essential in shaping the spatial dimension. Crucially, Rohmer's description of cinematic space in this article is entirely in accordance with Bazin's ideas regarding the affinity between cinematic space and the imaginary space being formed in the mind of the reader of a novel. In both cases, a centrifugal space is put together, as opposed to the centripetal one of theatre (and painting). 'Let us agree, by and large, that film sought to give the spectator as perfect an illusion of reality as possible within the limits of the logical demands of cinematographic narrative and of the current limits of technique. Thus the cinema stands in contrast to poetry, painting, and theatre, and comes ever closer to the novel.'[56]

> It is because cinema as the art of space and time is the contrary of painting that it has something to add to it. Such a contradiction does not exist between the novel and the film. Not only are they both narrative arts, that is to say temporal arts, but it is not even possible to maintain a priori that the cinematic image is essentially inferior to the image prompted by the written word. In all probability the opposite is the case. But this is not where the problem lies. It is enough if the novelist, like the filmmaker, is concerned with the idea of unfolding a real world. Once we accept these essential resemblances, there is nothing absurd in trying to write a novel on film.[57]

53 See, for instance, Bazin, 'Theatre and Cinema', pp. 102-112.
54 Rohmer, 'Reflections on Colour', p. 39.
55 Rohmer, 'Cinema, an Art of Space', p. 19.
56 Bazin, 'An Aesthetic of Reality', p. 26.
57 Bazin, '*Le Journal d'un cure de campagne* and the Stylistics of Robert Bresson', p. 143.

This idea that cinematic space is basically the extension of novelistic space by different means is fairly recurrent in the éS/pda's writings – for instance, in his 1958 review of Alexandre Astruc's *Une vie*: Jean-Luc Godard praises the film for a novelistic quality that ultimately coincides with the way cinematic space unfurls through time.

> With most directors, the *geometrical locus* of the theme they are supposed to be dealing with extends no further than the location where it is filmed. What I mean is that although the action of their films may take place over a vast area, most directors do not *think* their *mise en scene* beyond the area of the set. Astruc, on the other hand, gives the impression of having thought his film over the whole perimeter required by the action – no more, no less. In *Une Vie*, we are only shown three or four landscapes in Normandy. Yet the film gives an uncanny feeling of having been *planned on the actual scale of Normandy*, just as *Tabu* was for the Pacific, or *Que Viva Mexico!* for Mexico. The references may be exaggerated. But they are there. The fact is too remarkable not to be pointed out, and it is all the more remarkable in that Astruc and Laudenbach have deliberately made difficulties for themselves by only showing, as I have just noted, three or four aspects of the Norman woodlands. The difficulty is not in showing the forest, but in showing a room where one *knows* that the forest is a few paces away; an even greater difficulty is, not in showing the sea, but a room where one *knows* the sea is a few hundred yards away. Most films are constructed over the few square feet of decor visible in the viewfinder. *Une Vie* is conceived, written and directed over twenty thousand square kilometres.[58]

This is no doubt an evocative kind of reading, one that is probably not meant to be taken literally, or as an actual piece of analysis. Still, the underlying idea is conspicuous: films and novels share a similar spatiality. Novels suggest a mental image of what they do not show, while films suggest a mental image of what they can *only partially* show: the piecemeal deployment of an area that can only be shown one fragment at a time, as it always extends beyond the limits of the single frame. *Une vie*, the way Godard describes it, is a crossbreed of both kinds of space: it suggests an area that it does not show, but also shows areas that are adjacent to other, unseen ones (like the room by the forest and the room by the sea). Incidentally, this conception is echoed in a passage Rohmer wrote two years before, regarding *Paris Does*

58 Godard, 'Une vie', pp. 96-97.

Strange Things (*Eléna et les hommes*, Jean Renoir, 1956): 'What kind of shot is most common in *Eléna*? The master shot, you unhesitatingly answer. Well, the detail images are much more numerous than those of the whole, but by using the correct proportion, the director is able to give us the impression that we are seeing all of the set at each moment and that at the same time the characters are as close to our eyes as we would like'.[59]

However, this crucial similarity between novel and cinema aside, what exactly does Rohmer mean by 'an art of space' (as opposed to the novel, a temporal art)? In short, he means 'an art of appearances', a different arrangement between 'showing' and 'telling' than that of literature. Better still, he means 'an art of *appearance for appearance's sake*'. This turn of phrase (not Rohmer's own, but nonetheless aptly encapsulating his point) needs to be explained. To this end, it is worth referring to Rohmer's 'Chaplin/Keaton' divide.

Chaplin's films are handicapped by the fact that

> gestures, stances, and movements take on meaning only in reference to the series of states of consciousness or intentions that they reveal, one by one. Spoken language or mimicry is replaced by an 'allusive' mode of expression, less conventional than the first, subtler and richer than the second, but whose values depends not on the necessary quality that gesture acquires by means of its presence in a certain space, but on the relationship we establish between the gesture and its significance.[60]

The point here is strictly *linguistic*: Chaplin's images are still bound to an inherently anti-cinematic dimension: that of *expression*. Chaplin, in other words, treats images like *signs*, i.e. like mere means whereby a *meaning* is conveyed.[61] What Rohmer rejects is the existence itself of an intention to

59 Rohmer, '*Paris Does Strange Things*: Venus and the Apes', p. 185. As early as 1949, Rohmer wrote that 'Renoir is one of those who deeply felt that the mise-en-scène of a shot should not be done according to the surface of the screen, but according to the totality of the space wherein characters move' (Rohmer, 'Le Festival du film maudit', p. 761); originally: 'Renoir est un de ceux qui ont le plus profondément senti que la mise en scène d'un plan ne devait pas s'effectuer en fonction de la surface de l'écran, mais de la totalité de l'espace où évoluent les personnages'.

60 Rohmer, 'Cinema, an Art of Space', p. 22.

61 Rohmer reiterated his anti-Chaplinian bias in a 1949 article ('Preston Sturges, ou la mort du comique') where he set that director against Preston Sturges. 'Chaplin's art consisted precisely in bringing forth, by convoluted ways, a tenderness in ourselves taking us directly to his heroes' heart, like in the famous scene from *The Golden Rush* where Georgia contemplates the photo she found under the bolster. Conversely, Preston Sturges wants our gaze to always come from outside, as attested by his more-descriptive-than-allusive style of *mise en scène*. The serious in his

signify, separated from the means whereby it is effectively signified. The same reproach is extended to William Wyler (who 'has merely created a specific language to express a predetermined psychological content by visual as well as spatial means'[62]) and René Clair, who

> was able to have his characters evolve inside a universe where their smallest intentions were immediately translated into spatial language. Even the choice of a setting for *Quatorze juillet* allowed him to tell his story by simply moving the camera back and forth from one side of the street to the other. Space here is more a convenient means of signifying than it is a creator of signification.[63]

Albeit 'less intelligent' than Chaplin's, 'a less refined cinema' like Mack Sennett's and 'the first American burlesque films' are 'closer to a pure art of movement', because they rely on more purely spatial dynamics, like 'the simple confrontation of two dimensions' or 'the mechanical repetition of a gesture'.[64] But nobody could access the secrets of cinematic spatiality better than Buster Keaton.

> The reason is that the psychological significance of a movement counts much less for him than does the comical aspect, which is revealed in the way the movement is etched on the space of the screen. In *Batling Butler*, for example, for almost fifteen minutes we watch the novice boxer try in vain to recreate the simple uppercut movement that his manager is trying to teach him. This comedy of failure would not be original if the awkwardness of the gesture had not been developed, so to speak, in its own right – to the extent that the gesture can finally find an aesthetic justification through repetition – but especially because it appears as a sort of questioning of space, an inquiry into the 'workings' of the three dimensions – in this case ludicrous, but one that could just as well be troubled and tragic.[65]

works is not to be taken seriously, but rather to be our laughingstock.' Originally: 'L'art de Chaplin était précisément de faire naitre en nous, par des voies détournées, un attendrissement qui nous introduisait au coeur de ses héros, comme dans la scène fameuse de *La Ruée vers l'or*, où Georgia contemple la photographie découverte sous le traversin. Au contraire, Preston Sturges veut que notre regard vienne toujours du dehors: son style de mise en scène, plus descriptif qu'allusif, en témoigne. Ce qu'il y a de sérieux dans son oeuvre n'y est pas pour être pris au sérieux, mais faire encore l'objet de nos rires'. Whereas Chaplin expresses the feelings of his characters and wants to put the audience in contact with them, Sturges sticks to description, to the surface, to the outside.

62 Rohmer, 'Cinema, an Art of Space', p. 28.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 22-23.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

65 *Ibid.*

In Keaton's films, as opposed to Chaplin's, there is no trace of 'the relationship we establish between the gesture and its significance', i.e. of a relationship that cannot but be essentially *temporal*, as the two related terms (like more generally the signifier and the signified in language) are clearly not coincident, distinct and dislocated.[66] In Keaton, all takes place in the space delineated by the images. Whereas 'the novelistic narrative only appears to bring forth the reality of the narrated moments through their integration into a temporal totality,'[67] cinema works differently. It still owes the signification of each of its moments to the overall temporality they are inserted in, *but this temporality is deployed in spatial terms*. That is to say, the sequence of discreet moments unfolds in space, if only the virtual space deployed in a piecemeal fashion by the succession of shots. Time unfurls through purely spatial relations, and space does not refer to anything beyond itself and its own deployment in time. This is why cinema does not need literary techniques: the latter deliver manipulations of time qua emanations of some consciousness (the novelist's and/or the narrator's and/or the character's/s', etc.), while in cinema temporality is spatialized: whatever series forms the temporality at stake, it is inscribed in space. This inscription in space allows the various moments making up a temporal series to seemingly unfold by means of a logic and coherence *of their own*, and not because of an arbitrary logic and coherence coming from the kind of temporalization a contingent for-itself consciousness can provide. Thereby, cinema is able to prescind from the expressive/linguistic bias still implied in literary techniques: because of the latter, novels can only *show* on the basis of time, while cinema can only *tell* on the basis of space. Reflective consciousness in this case indeed manages to be nothing; the non-positional consciousness of the (positional) consciousness of what is shown in the images is not 'nothing but a contingent, temporalizing agency,' but rather 'nothing but the spatial deployment of a temporalization.' Narration disappears in the spatialization of narrative. Notoriously, a likewise conflation between spatialization and narrative concatenation typically characterizes classical narrative cinema: 'in general the classical film translates narrational omniscience into spatial omnipresence.'[68] Suffice it to mention Stephen Heath's 'Narrative Space', arguably a deliberate crowning summary of a more than decade-long stream

66 *Ibid.*, p. 23-24. This is also why, the critic says, a verbal account of a Keatonian gag is never funny, whereas one of a Chaplinian gag often is.

67 Rohmer, 'L'âge du roman américain', p. 563. Originally: 'La narration romanesque ne semble pouvoir fonder la réalité de chacun des instants qu'elle retrace que par leur insertion dans une totalité temporelle'.

68 Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 125.

of structuralist and post-structuralist reflections (among a number of others, by Jean-Pierre Oudart, Christian Metz and Noël Burch), published in *Screen*, a journal that, at that time (1976), had long chosen to side against any neo-Kantian tradition.[69] As a partisan of classical, narrative cinema, Rohmer would have almost totally agreed with Heath's depiction,[70] the difference between the two being instead downright *ideological*: while Heath claimed that cinema had to move away (and forward) from the illusory recreation of spatial and narrative uniformity, Rohmer (as we shall see in the next chapters) maintained that it had to stick to it, because cinema *is essentially* classical, narrative cinema.[71]

In the aforementioned example from Keaton, time is subordinated to space, since sequentiality is a mere backup to simultaneity: through repetition, a series of gestures unfolds so that, at some point, in one single gesture an unexpected difference can spring up. Keaton has what Chaplin lacks, i.e. 'the necessary quality that gesture acquires by means of its presence in a certain space';[72] 'necessary' here is to be thought alongside the 'necessity'

69 Brewster, 'From Shklovsky to Brecht: a reply'.

70 Classical, narrative cinema creates a spatial continuity by means of the piecemeal deployment of time and narrative. Movement is gradually integrated within the artificial continuity mastered by the spectator from his own privileged position. Thereby, space is converted into *place*, that is, a *scene* where things happen. 'The centre is the movement, not movements but the logic of a consequent and temporally coherent action. The vision of the image is its narrative clarity and that clarity hangs on the negation of space for place, the constant realisation of centre in function of narrative purpose, narrative movement. [...] Which is to say, of course, that the tableau space of the early films is intolerable in its particular fixity, must be broken up in the interests of the unity of action and place and subject view as that unity is conceived from the narrative models of the novelistic that cinema is dominantly exploited to relay and extend. [...] The need is to cut up and then join together in a kind of spatial *Aufhebung* that decides a superior unity, the binding of the spectator in the space of the film, the space it realises' (Heath, 'Narrative Space', p. 86). Rohmer would basically agree to this: in the wake of the novel, cinema is expected to deploy in front of the spectator an imaginary spatial continuity ('an order of the pregnancy of space in frame', p. 92) through time ('one of the narrative acts of a film is the creation of space but what gives the moving space its coherence in time, decides the metonymy as a "taking place", is here "the narrative itself", and above all as it crystallises round character as look and point of view,' p. 92).

71 A more thorough explanation of the reasons why their positions differ would lead us too far astray. To cut a long story short, it can be argued that their main divergence has to do with the fact that Heath singles out a sort of historical origin (the advent of central perspective) for the kind of viewing subject that narrative space 'positions' within its piecemeal deployment (thereby also engendering an 'other scene', made of everything that this positioning leaves out: heterogeneity, contradiction, history etc.), while Rohmer's bias is more metaphysical than historical, and is as such less inclined to historicize the vicissitudes of the viewing subject and more to regard it as timeless and given once and for all.

72 Rohmer, 'Cinema, an Art of Space', p. 22.

sketched a few pages ago: a chair on the cinema screen can only be *that* chair, but this 'that' can only mean 'a specific one, which is inserted in a given spatio-temporal context'. Thus 'necessary' here also means *relational* (that is, spatial): images are not signs supporting the temporal, arbitrary process of signification, but rather take part in a spatialization of time whereby each of them is confronted over time with the other images belonging to the same environment all around (that is, to a space whose deployment and figuration also occurs over time). What matters is not the signifier-signified, inside-outside kind of relationship characterizing linguistic signs (whose inherent arbitrariness is now replaced by the necessary dependence on a surrounding spatio-temporal context), but, should these visual objects ever be seen as signs of some sort, they would rather form a signifier-signifier-signifier- (and so on) kind of relationship. No wonder that Rohmer compared Buster Keaton to Franz Kafka,[73] whose way of writing has often[74] been described in terms of a completely external system of differences among signifiers that had nothing to do with representation or signification.

Interestingly, this applies to aural signs as well (typically: words). For the critic, verbal language matters not so much for what it signifies, but as a physical object in itself, inserted in a definite context. Three months after signing 'Cinema, an Art of Space', Rohmer published an article in which he argued that a talking cinema worthy of the name should not consider the spoken word as an indifferent piece of matter, or as an instrument to signify, but rather as something endowed with an existence of its own.[75] As such, it should not be conceived as a mere backup of what the images show, but as an autonomous element whose role and function is wholly relational, that is, depending on the relations it establishes with every other (and not necessarily visual) element of the film.[76] Thus, the spoken word is for him less an instrument to speak (or tell), than something to be *shown*, no less legitimately in an aural fashion. In 1971, in a letter in reply to a critic accusing him to make literary films, he wrote:

> There is certainly literary material in my tales, a preestablished novelistic plot that could be developed in writing and that is, in fact, sometimes developed in the form of a commentary. But neither the text of these

73 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

74 For instance, by Maurice Blanchot way more than once, or in Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*.

75 Tom Gunning noticed this feature too, in his 'Eric Rohmer and the Legacy of Cinematic Realism', pp. 30-31.

76 Rohmer, 'For a Talking Cinema'. See also his 'Politics Against Destiny', where he acknowledges *dialogues* as the pivot of the *mise en scène* of Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *The Quiet American* (1958).

> commentaries, nor that of my dialogues, is my film: Rather, they are things that I film, just like the landscapes, faces, behaviour, and gestures. And if you say that speech is an impure element, I no longer agree with you. Like images, it is a part of the life I film.[77]

1.5. An art of appearance for appearance's sake

For all these reasons, appearance is not the means whereby some inner essence, some meaning or some 'beyond' is expressed: it is appearance *for appearance's sake*. It is 'manifestation' as opposed to 'expression': while the latter presupposes some ideally pre-existing 'inside' (some essence, meaning, content or else) being conveyed by means of an 'outside' (a sign of some sort), the former stands for the immediate coincidence between inside and outside, i.e. for something in relation to which there can be no essence/meaning/content/etc., liable to be located anywhere else than in its immediate surface. Similar to those theorists (like Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein) who invented the notion of *photogénie* more than twenty years before, Rohmer thought of cinema as the seat of revelation through a specifically cinematic kind of appearance.[78] It does not matter much whether what is revealed ('by', say, 'sinuous bodies intertwined in the usual brawl or by a frantic gallop across the screen'[79]) is called 'being', 'meaning', 'essence' or else; what truly matters is that it can be located nowhere but in appearance itself, and that it points

77 Rohmer, 'Letter to a Critic: *Contes moraux*', p. 80. Such a subject would obviously lend itself to infinite speculation. However, Rohmer never really elaborated on it while working as a film critic; only after he became a filmmaker he resumed and delved deeper into the ideas he had sketched in 'For a Talking Cinema': see for instance his 'Valeur pédagogique du document iconograpique filmé', as well as 'Confronter le texte avec le monde qui l'a inspiré.'

78 Twelve years later, Rohmer maintained that 'the evolution of the past ten years' (that is, 'the advent of color, the wide screen, the zoom lens' and so on and so forth) led to 'the progressive abandonment of a notion that was quite suitable and successful in its time: that of the photogenic, in the sense that Louis Delluc, the inventor of the term, gave it.' Rohmer, 'Faith and Mountains: *Les Etoiles de midi*', p. 118. Put differently, Rohmer acknowledged that the classical notion of *photogénie* was of little use after the war, because it didn't sufficiently take into account cinema's realist vocation, greatly enhanced by the technical evolutions that occurred in the meantime. *Photogénie* was a more genuinely visual, more artfully *plastic* (more on this later) notion than Rohmer's appearance for appearance's sake. Moreover, either *photogénie* per se and the reproduction of reality per se were less and less sought after by Rohmer after 1948; rather, as we shall see in the last chapter, he got increasingly interested in a sort of grey area where the two appear inseparable and indistinguishable.

79 Rohmer, 'Cinema, an Art of Space', p. 28.

to no 'beyond' whatsoever.[80] Put differently, whereas 'expression' points at a potential meaning (or essence, etc.) becoming actual, 'manifestation', is the mere display of some potentiality of meaning (as in the example of the chair outlined a few pages ago).

Is this enough to make Rohmer a 'spiritualist' film theorist? Yes and no. Actually, this 1948 article seems rather free from such suspicion; if anything, this suspicion only proved to be definitely more grounded later on in his career. When he praised Murnau for having eliminated 'all elements that draw our attention to something other than the immediate feeling of transcendence within the gesture,'[81] thereby implying that there is no beyond ('the immediate feeling of transcendence') but in appearance itself ('within the gesture'), the word 'transcendence' is to be read less as a sign of spiritualism than a reminiscence of Sartre and of his *Being and Nothingness*. Indeed, 'Cinema an Art of Space' interweaves genuinely Sartrean stances with others announcing the 'conversion' to come.

Because in Rohmer's written production some kind of vaguely Heideggerian 'revelation of being' is often at stake, it is necessary to examine the chapter of *Being and Nothingness* most closely related to this topic. It is the chapter about *quality*, that is, 'the being of the *this* when it is considered apart from all external relation with the world or with other *thises*.'[82] It is important to emphasize that Sartre does not conceive quality as a subjective determination: 'The yellow of the lemon is not a subjective mode of apprehending the lemon; it is the lemon.'[83] Is it then something 'objective'? Yes and no. More precisely:

> in order for there to be quality there must be being for a nothingness which by nature is not being. Yet being is not in itself a quality although it is nothing either more or less. But quality is the whole of being revealing itself within the limits of the 'there is'. It is not the 'outside' of being; it is all being since there cannot be being for being but only for that which makes itself not to be being. The relation of the For-itself to quality is an ontological relation. The intuition of a quality is not the passive contemplation of a given, and the mind is not an In-itself which remains what it is in that contemplation; that is, which remains in the mode of indifference

80 'It would be useless for [cinema] to try to make more of the instant than the instant itself contains.' Godard, '*No Sad Songs For Me*', p. 21.

81 Rohmer, 'Cinema, an Art of Space', p. 26.

82 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 186.

83 *Ibid.*

> in relation to the this contemplated. But the For-itself makes known to itself what it is by means of quality. For the For-itself, to perceive red as the colour of this notebook is to reflect on itself as the internal negation of that quality. That is, the apprehension of quality is not a 'fulfilment' (*Erfillung*) as Husserl makes it, but the giving form to an emptiness as a determined emptiness of that quality. In this sense quality is a presence perpetually out of reach.[84]

Consciousness of man (for-itself) does not 'project' the quality onto the (in-itself) object; rather, it is the object itself that commands that projection, by means of being that nothingness that (for-itself) consciousness *also* is, albeit in a different way. In this respect, it is not that being-in-itself reveals being by itself, as it were 'oozing' it: it only does so because for-itself consciousness is, as it were, *embedded* within the in-itself the very moment the former finds itself detached from the latter. 'We shall best account for the original phenomenon of perception by insisting on the fact that the relation of the quality to us is that of absolute proximity (it "is there", it haunts us) without either giving or refusing itself, but we must add that this proximity implies a distance. It is what is immediately out of reach, what by definition refers us to ourselves as to an emptiness.'[85]

Let us return to the passage where Rohmer mentioned the 'transcendence within the gesture,' duly complemented by the immediately preceding sentences:

> Murnau was able not only to avoid all anecdotal concessions, but also to dehumanize those subjects richest in human emotion. Thus, *Nosferatu* is constructed entirely around visual themes corresponding to concepts that have physiological or metaphysical equivalents in us (the concepts of suction or absorption, of being held or being crushed, and so forth). All elements that draw our attention to something other than the immediate feeling of transcendence within the gesture are eliminated.[86]

Murnau supremely embodied the 'art of space', not just because he excelled in staging bodies and things in front of the camera, but because he turned cinematic appearance into revelation. What was revealed was nothing but appearance itself (again: cinema is an art of space as the art of revealing appearance for appearance's sake) – or better still: appearance *plus a certain*

84 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 186-187.
85 *Ibid.*, p. 187.
86 Rohmer, 'Cinema, an Art of Space', p. 26.

nothing. What is this nothing? It is an 'abstraction [that] does not enrich being; it is only the revelation of a nothingness of being beyond being.'[87] This abstraction is the for-itself, the consciousness of man transcending being-in-itself by a nihilation that is nonetheless embedded in what is nihilated. Only *a nothingness*, precisely, separates the for-itself from the in-itself, and that is the nothingness 'added' to and by appearance qua revelation.

> Abstraction [...] is a phenomenon of presence to being since abstract being preserves its transcendence. But it can be realized only as a presence to being beyond being; it is a surpassing. This presence to being can be realized only on the level of possibility and in so far as the For-itself has to be its own possibilities. The abstract is revealed as the meaning which quality has to be as co-present to the presence of a for-itself to-come. Thus the abstract green is the meaning-to-come of the concrete this in so far as it reveals itself to me through its profile 'green-brightness-roughness'. The green is the peculiar possibility of this profile in so far as it is revealed across the possibilities which I am; that is, in so far as it is made-to-be.[88]

Murnau emphasizes visual themes that resonate within us ('the concepts of suction or absorption, of being held or being crushed, and so forth'), that is, in our own consciousness *as embedded in the in-itself* (*that is, in appearance*). 'All elements that draw our attention to something other than the immediate feeling of transcendence within the gesture are eliminated': there is a transcendence, a for-itself, but it remains wholly within appearance (that is, within the gesture appearing on the screen). Murnau does not use the images to express a content formulated by some separate for-itself consciousness, but rather shapes them so that the viewer can feel his own for-itself consciousness *there*, enshrined in the images. Accordingly, cinema is for Rohmer an art of space insofar as it is the art of appearance for appearance's sake, i.e. appearance qua revelation of 'nothing' beyond itself, that 'nothing' being the for-itself consciousness of man, which is included in appearance by its very nihilation.

'Appearance for appearance's sake' is literally cinema's answer to Sartrean novelistic for-itself consciousness: whereas the latter is too cumbersome, 'not nothing enough' in that it too heavily relies on contingent, linguistic/temporal articulations, in the former the reflective consciousness accompanying the images (the non-positional found along with the positional) is really *nowhere but* in the images.

87 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 189.
88 *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

1.6. Space vs. language

The notion of space outlined in *Being and Nothingness* also resonates with the one in 'Cinema an Art of Space'.

> [Space is] a moving relation between beings which are unrelated. It is the total independence of the in-itselfs, as it is revealed to a being which is presence to 'all' the in-itself as the independence of each one in relation to the others. It is the unique way in which beings can be revealed as having no relation, can be thus revealed to the being through which relation comes into the world; that is, space is pure exteriority. [...] Space is not the world, but it is the instability of the world apprehended as totality, inasmuch as the world can always disintegrate into external multiplicity. Space [...] depends on temporality and appears in temporality since it can come into the world only through a being whose mode of being is temporalization [...] In this sense it would be useless to conceive of space as a form imposed on phenomena by the a priori structure of our sensibility. Space can not be a form, for it is nothing; it is, on the contrary, the indication that nothing except the negation-and this still as a type of external relation which leaves intact what it unites-can come to the in-itself through the For-itself. As for the For-itself, if it is not space, this is because it apprehends itself precisely as not being being-in-itself in so far as the in-itself is revealed to it in the mode of exteriority which we call extension.[89]

It should be noticed in passing that Sartre (unsurprisingly) refuses to think of space as an a priori form of sensible intuition, unlike Kant (to whom Rohmer returned after his 'conversion'). Space is rather pure exteriority, the separateness of the various in-itselfs that the for-itself (that is, human consciousness) discovers as soon as it has emerged by means of self-reflection.

> Thus space and quantity are only one and the same type of negation. By the sole fact that *this* and *that* are revealed as having no relation to me who am my own relation, space and quantity come into the world; for each one of them is the relation of things which are unrelated or, if you prefer, the nothingness of relation apprehended as a relation by the being which is its own relation.[90]

89 *Ibid.*, p. 184.
90 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

Space thus callously *isolates*. Therein resides its properly existential relevance. It displays all single beings as inherently, reciprocally unrelated – and this applies to the for-itself as well, faced with the foreignness of the beings from which it has nihilated. The awareness of *this* aspect of space is what makes Buster Keaton great.

> Solitude for Chaplin, even in the famous scenes of *The Circus* or *The Gold Rush*, is never more than man's solitude in an indifferent society. For Buster Keaton, the isolation of beings and things appears instead as intrinsic to the nature of space. Such isolation is expressed particularly by a back-and-forth movement – as if everything were continually 'returned' to itself – as well as by the brutal falls, the flattening on the floor, and the awkward grasping of objects that turn or break, as if the external world were impossible to grasp.[91]

Cinema is thus an art of space, because it is the art of *absolute exteriority*. It shows that interiority, the internal self-relation grounding the for-itself, has no place in a world dominated by space, i.e. by the complete exteriority of the relations between reciprocally unrelated beings. The only place it can have is, precisely, that of the nothingness between appearance and appearance itself, as in the sentence lengthily explained above: 'appearance for appearance's sake' (clearly just another way to say 'absolute exteriority').

What is far less Sartrean is the fact that, in Rohmer's article, space is set radically *against* language. Cinema is an art of space insofar as it is not an art of language (whereas the novel can be the former only through the latter). It is striking that, already in this early phase, Rohmer's always overt endorsement of ontology (the study 'of the structures of being of the existent taken as a totality'[92]) takes the form of an *opposition* (as in Keaton vs. Chaplin). Here, as in most of his subsequent film-critical production, ontology seemingly concerns less the self-revelation of some positive being per se, than that of whatever does *not* fall under the grip of language. Put differently, his ontology is very often ontology *as opposed to* language, an ontology whose scope apparently could be singled out only negatively. In 'Cinema, an Art of Space', Rohmer's point is *oppositional*: he does not really seem to want to list a series of positive, identifying features of cinematic moving images; rather, he is at pains to provide a strikingly exact reversal of

91 Rohmer, 'Cinema, an Art of Space', p. 24.
92 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 632.

Ferdinand de Saussure's principles defining the linguistic sign: its arbitrary nature,[93] and the linear nature of the signifier.[94]

Rohmer rigidly opposed ontology vs. language, manifestation vs. expression. Cinema is unambiguously on the side of space, and space is unambiguously on the side of ontology and manifestation. There is no such rigidity in Sartre. In *Being and Nothingness*, language is 'the proof which a for-itself can make of its being-for-others, and finally it is the surpassing of this proof and the utilization of it toward possibilities which are my possibilities; that is, toward my possibilities of being this or that for the Other.'[95] The meaning of this 'Other' with a capital 'O' will be clarified later; the fact remains that this treatise attributes no small role to language: it is the mediation itself between the 'solitude' of the for-itself and its being-for-others. Rohmer's stigmatization of language seems rather distant. For him, cinema is on the side of space, that is, of the absolute separation among the reciprocally unrelated *thises*, *as opposed to language*, and it is precisely this feature that makes cinema valuable. As hinted at in our previous discussion of Keaton's cinema according to Rohmer, the critic also frequently associated space (the spatial character of moving images) with *necessity*, as opposed to the arbitrariness of language (that is, of the relation between signifier and signified): '[In expressionist films] movements and gestures whose meaning seemed contingent are in a sense – by their insertion into a certain spatial universe – grounded in necessity: Lips spread in laughter, an arm raised in self-defence, a face convulsed in anger – all are enriched by new meaning that can deprive them even of their direct emotive powers and leave them with only their pure quality of *fascination*.'[96]

This is already a considerable shift from Sartre's 'novelistic ontology', revolving around temporality and contingency. Freedom and contingency are on the side of the internal self-relation of the for-itself consciousness, while destiny and necessity are on the outside (or at least outside of the structure of time, which remains contingent). As Jean Pouillon put it, 'in fact, time ties its components together with no need to attach other notions on it in order to think and describe this connection. On the other hand, connections in space – which are the responsibility of the physicist rather

93 De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 67.

94 'The signifier, being auditory, is unfolded solely in time from which it gets the following characteristics: (a) it represents a span, and (b) the span is measurable in a single dimension; it is a line.' De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 70. Instead, according to Rohmer, moving images are spatial/relational, and privilege simultaneity over sequentiality.

95 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 373.

96 Rohmer, 'Cinema, an Art of Space', p. 26.

than the novelist – require, in order to be thought and described, to do violence to the absolutely dividing character of space by presenting its connection as absolutely necessary.'[97] Rohmer would add that not only the physicist, but also the *filmmaker* must cope with space and the sense of necessity it brings along, as opposed to the freedom and the contingency of the novel qua 'an art of time'. Sartre was not unaware of the fact that cinema differed from the novel, especially in that cinematic time lost the novel's contingency in favour of a quantified, irreversible kind of time.[98] Rohmer, though, went as far as to embrace that necessity and irreversibility by acknowledging it as fully spatial, and as such fully cinematic. This is not very Sartrean, to say the least.

It can be argued, then, that in the late 1940s, after the publication of a 'behaviourist' novel (*Elizabeth*) blatantly trying to reproduce the kind of objectivity Sartre and the existentialist-inflected literary theory and criticism of the day tended to praise in American novels, Rohmer was struggling to wrestle cinema away from the novel, while still acknowledging a strong affinity between the two.[99] Cinema was simply more novelistic than the novel itself, because it could better serve the latter's tendency to privilege 'showing' over 'telling', and because it fulfilled the promise of 'reflective consciousness *qua nothingness*' that the novel can never really accomplish, because it can only be too bound to language and to the contingency of an individuated temporalizing agency. Instead, cinema is an art of space, that is, an art of appearance for appearance's sake: it can focus on sheer exteriority more than the novel can, because while the latter deploys a temporality marked by the contingency of consciousness, cinema can make temporality into a spatialized series, by making the moments and phases

97 Pouillon, *Temps et roman*, p. 29. Originally: 'C'est qu'en effet le temps lie ses composants, sans qu'il faille, pour penser cette liaison et la décrire, plaquer dessus d'autres notions, alors que la liaison dans l'espace – dont s'occupe le physicien et non le romancier – exige, pour être pensée et décrite, qu'on fasse violence au caractère absolument diviseur de l'espace en la présentant comme absolument nécessaire.'

98 Chateau, *Sartre et le cinéma*, pp. 87-88.

99 In a 2009 interview with Noël Herpe and Philippe Fauvel (in Patrick Louguet (ed.), *Rohmer ou le jeu des variations*), Rohmer avowed that 'one can be surprised that I couldn't catch the train of the Nouveau Roman to which *Elisabeth* had straightforwardly led me. Truth is, I didn't believe in literature any longer.' Originally: 'On peut s'étonner que je n'ai pas su prendre en marche le train du "Nouveau Roman" où me conduisait tout droit *Elisabeth*. Mais je ne croyais plus à la littérature' (p. 214). The relationship between the éS/pda and the *nouveau roman* literary trend (which Rohmer here regards as the natural prolongation of Sartrean/existentialist cult for the objectivity and for the behaviorism of contemporary American literature) will be tackled in the last chapter.

whereby it is composed unfold in space. In Sartrean philosophical and novelistic perspective, consciousness is also self-consciousness, in that it is positional (consciousness of the chair) *and* non-positional (consciousness of *myself* being consciousness of the chair); in place of the latter (a contingent, individuated, temporalizing for-itself consciousness), cinema displays a temporality that is *one with* the spatiality being 'positionally' deployed. In other words, to Rohmer cinema was the embodied refutation of the Sartrean philosophical premise the novel rests upon: a reflective consciousness that can hold some grasp *on itself* (as well as on that of which it is the consciousness). Accordingly, at that time, Rohmer held one foot in Sartre's philosophy and novelistic aesthetic, while the other was already walking away from it, toward a soon-to-be 'conversion'.

1.7. An art more novelistic than the novel itself

Rohmer often insisted on the fact that, because cinema *immediately finds* what literature is compelled to eternally look for in vain[100] (a non-linguistic adherence to showing the surface of phenomena, a reflective consciousness filtering phenomena 'qua nothingness'), films should not try to imitate literature and to adopt its writerly tricks and gimmicks. The latter articulate a temporality corresponding to a contingent, definite consciousness, while in cinema the deployment of temporality (the unfolding of a temporal series) is, as it were, carved in space by default, with no need for it to be 'signed' by a specific reflective consciousness. Because cinema is automatically novelistic by virtue of its spatial nature, there is no point in deliberately reproducing the stylistic features characterizing the novel, viz. more generally a kind of narration shaping narrative in a typically literary way. 'The novel and film are close relatives, no doubt, but we may also find that the former exerts too great a tyranny over the latter, to the point that we often speak of cinematic quality when the word novelistic would be more appropriate.'[101] 'Why should [cinema] imitate a literature that, born of cinema, can offer cinema only

100 It should be noted in passing that André Bazin propounded the opposite view, that is, cinema follows in the novel's footsteps. The novel has little to gain from imitating cinema, but cinema has even less to lose in drawing inspiration from the novel. See, for instance his 'In Defence of Mixed Cinema', or '*Le Journal d'un cure de campagne* and the Stylistics of Robert Bresson'. A worthwhile elucidation about the novelistic roots of Bazin's notion of 'cinematic *mise en scène*' can be found in Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism*, pp. 1-86.

101 Rohmer, 'Renoir's Youth', p. 191.

a pale reflection of itself?'[102] This idea appeared at the very beginning of his film-critical career and would heavily inform his subsequent written production[103] until he quit film criticism to become a filmmaker – and even thereafter. It can be safely argued that this is Rohmer's original, basic, fundamental idea, as it always remained the same while theoretical frames came and went in a relatively indifferent and contingent way.

While often insisting that cinema is *essentially* American cinema (itself variously related to the American novel of that century), he not infrequently slated films that tried to not only adapt some twentieth century American novel for the screen, but also imitate the stylistic features commonly associated to that literary trend, like for instance *The Wayward Bus* by Victor Vicas[104] (1957, taken from Steinbeck) or *God's Little Acre* by Anthony Mann (1958, taken from Caldwell). John Huston's *Moby Dick* (1956) encountered the same fate, but with an aggravating factor: the original novel was particularly unsuitable, because it was already *too cinematic*; Melville managed to create by means of verbal language a universe that was more purely visual/spatial than that staged by John Huston, who relied on too many literary artifices instead of finding/recreating Melville's intensity on the surface of things and beings.[105] Because he relied on techniques less than Huston did, Melville was ultimately more cinematic than the filmmaker, and more able to *show*.

If this sounds paradoxical, it is because Rohmer's view of cinema and literature essentially is. According to him, the purer cinema is, the more novelistic it is, but at the same time, the purer cinema is, and hence the more novelistic it is, the less it should try to resemble the novel, otherwise it would lose either its novelistic and cinematic values.[106] This means that cinema should try to be novelistic (that is, to privilege the outside over the inside, and to treat reflective consciousness as a nothingness) while 'forgetting' the novel's features, styles and forms, i.e. all that belongs to the typically literary

102 Rohmer, 'The Classical Age of Film', p. 41.

103 For instance, in Rohmer, 'Rediscovering America', pp. 91-92, or in his interventions during the roundtable with Bazin, Doniol-Valcroze, Kast, Leenhardt and Rivette 'Six Characters in Search of *auteurs*: A Discussion about the French Cinema', (particularly p. 41).

104 Rohmer, 'Les naufragés de l'autocar'. Claude-Edmonde Magny's *The Age of the American Novel* is quoted within the review.

105 Rohmer, 'Lesson of a Failure: *Moby Dick*'.

106 Such paradoxes are interestingly explored in the article ('Films and the Three Levels of Discourse: Indirect, Direct and Hyperdirect') he wrote to justify the choices behind his filmed adaptation of Kleist's *The Marquise of O...* (1976). Part of the article aimed at showing that it is wrong to assume that while the three traditional levels of discourse (indirect/direct/hyperdirect) are available to the novel, only one (the hyperdirect) would be available to cinema: precisely because cinema is 'literary at heart', all three actually (and most naturally) belong to it.

way to intertwine narrative and narration. Very few directors managed to do so; one of them was Howard Hawks: 'What makes [Hawks's] style so difficult to define, is that it does not correspond to the point of view of the narrator – of God (there is no descriptive camera movements, or any Wellesian static shot), neither to that of the characters (the style involving association of ideas).'[107] The typically literary dilemma of point of view is solved by *eschewing* it. A writer is obliged to choose between the narrator's or the character's point of view, but Hawks managed to choose *neither* of them: cinema should stick to a literary agenda by inventing means that are non-literary; it should face a literary question ('should one choose the narrator's of the character's point of view?') by providing answers that are not literary ('neither of them'). It should fulfil the novel's calling for a reflective consciousness qua nothingness by being able to choose *no* individuated consciousness in particular.

A passage in a review by Jean-Luc Godard, interestingly, mirrors this very topic.

> Let us take another example, this time from *Man of the West*. In the deserted town, Gary Cooper comes out of the little bank and looks to see if the bandit he has just shot is really dead, for he can see him stumbling in the distance at the end of the single street which slopes gently away at his feet. An ordinary director would simply have cut from Gary Cooper coming out to the dying bandit. A more subtle director might have added various details to enrich the scene, but would have adhered to the same principle of dramatic composition. The originality of Anthony Mann is that he is able to enrich while simplifying to the extreme. As he comes out, Gary Cooper is framed in medium shot. He crosses almost the entire field of vision to look at the deserted town, and then (rather than have a reverse angle of the town, followed by a shot of Gary Cooper's face as he watches) a lateral tracking shot re-frames Cooper as he stands motionless, staring at the empty town. The stroke of genius lies in having the track start *after* Gary Cooper moves, because it is this dislocation in time which allows a spatial simultaneity: in one fell swoop we have both the mystery of the deserted town, and Gary Cooper's sense of unease at the mystery.[108]

107 Rohmer, 'Ceiling Zero', p. 22. Originally: 'Ce qui rend son style [Hawks's] si difficile à definir, c'est qu'il ne répond ni au point de vue du narrateur – de Dieu (pas de mouvements d'appareils descriptifs, ou de plan fixe wellesien), ni des personnages (style d'associations d'idées).'
108 Godard, 'Supermann: *Man of the West*', pp. 119-120.

Godard here describes a literary problem and a cinematic solution. The literary problem is: 'should the point of view be impersonal or the character's?' The cinematic solution is, once again: 'neither of them'. The 'stroke of genius' of that tracking shot lies in its being external to both the character's point of view and the impersonal depiction of the deserted town. More than ten years after 'Cinema, an Art of Space', space ('spatial simultaneity') is still the non-literary overcoming of a literary deadlock; exteriority is the very solution to the impossibility of choosing between two inner ('for-itself') consciousnesses (the impersonal narrator's and the character's). Only a few months earlier, Luc Moullet had reiterated the equation among 'novelistic subtlety', '*mise en scène*' and 'full exteriority'.[109]

This goes a long way towards accounting for the fact that Rohmer's impulse in the éS years decisively contributed to shaping the pda's (mainly unspoken) idea that cinema was the quintessence of a novelistic aesthetic born in France in the nineteenth century and most brilliantly developed in the United States in the twentieth. In one of his first film reviews, Jacques Rivette wrote that Nicholas Ray's *They Live By Night* (1948) was the cinematic equivalent of Ernest Hemingway's novels.[110] Countless further examples (such as François Truffaut's remark that Max Ophuls pushed his character's feelings to their *physical* limit, just like Balzac[111]) could easily prove this point,[112] and Thomas Elsaesser already noticed long ago that the first decade of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* was heavily influenced by a literary bias best exemplified by Magny's *The Age of the American Novel*.[113]

However, if, on the one hand, '*politique des auteurs*, a strategy to promote and support *auteur*ist film practice, was a way of shaping the history of cinema according to the model derived from literature,'[114] on the other hand it would be wrong to assume that film directors were assimilated to writers just because they all used their respective medium in order to express themselves.[115] According to Magny, 'The error of naturalism is to have believed that the story would be more objective precisely to the degree that the narrator could be made more neutral, more impersonal,'[116]

109 Moullet, 'Re-création par la récréation' p. 56.

110 Rivette, 'Les principaux films du rendez-vous de Biarritz'.

111 Truffaut, 'Lola au bûcher', p. 30.

112 Not to mention the innumerable references to writers and books Godard loved to scatter throughout his writings.

113 Elsaesser, 'Two Decades in Another Country', pp. 241-242.

114 Ostrowska, *Reading the French New Wave*, p. 48.

115 This view is seemingly implied, for instance, in Gaut, 'Film Authorship and Collaboration'.

116 Magny, *The Age of the American novel*, p. 99.

whereas later generations of French and American literature proved this opinion wrong by affirming a very existentialist truth instead; namely, 'the idea that every observer,' every for-itself consciousness (as *Being and Nothingness* would have it) projected on the outside, 'has its own point of view, that every person is in a particular place.'[117] Absolute impersonality is inherently impossible, hence the inevitability of authorship. However, as we shall see in the next chapters, this bears little relation to the éS/pda's idea of authorship. Rather, the key analogy between films and novels (that is, the one the éS/pda was interested in the most), was a different one: the relatively similar way whereby a virtual space was put together and presented to reader/viewer's consciousness through time.

It is safe to argue that Sartrean existentialism, in all its various forms, be they philosophical or literary or else, is the very background from which the éS *moved away*; the eventual emergence of the pda was, ultimately, the ripe outcome of this disruption. In this transition away from Sartre, Alexandre Astruc played a key role. A young writer (his first novel, *Les Vacances*, was published by France's most important publishing house, Gallimard, in 1945, when he was only 22 years old), he was very close to Parisian existentialist environment in the Forties.[118] As a film critic (for *L'Ecran français* and other journals), he was regularly in touch with the members of the éS (particularly with Rohmer). If, on the one hand, he increasingly lost touch with that group after his 1952 debut behind the camera (*Le rideau cramoisi*), on the other hand his article 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo' is widely acknowledged as one of the most decisive sources of inspiration for the pda.

In his monograph on Astruc, Raymond Bellour makes it clear from the outset that the entire work of this novelist, film critic and director 'should be defined by the novel and in relation to the novel.'[119] Astruc himself repeatedly declared that films and novels share a common ground:[120] they are both arts of appearances. For him, *mise en scène* belonged indifferently to the novel and the cinema, and consisted of the art of making the inside

117 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

118 Regarding the links between Astruc and existentialism, see Lipkin, *The film criticism of François Truffaut*, pp. 83-115.

119 Bellour, *Alexandre Astruc*, p. 30. Originally: '[...] doit être définie par le romanesque et par rapport au romanesque.'

120 *Ibid.* Jacques Aumont rightly added that cinema, according to Astruc, is close to the novel *as opposed to* painting and theatre. This also explains why neither plastic nor dramatic dimensions are taken into account in his conception of *mise en scène*, designating first and foremost the way the inner truth of beings makes it on the surface. Aumont, *Le Cinéma et la mise en scène*, p. 57.

and the outside coincide.[121] 'The entire classical psychology is based on the fact that appearances are deceptive. I believe, however, that they are not.'[122] What distinguishes the cinema from the novel is precisely the way they relate to the outside. 'Film is defined by its exteriority whereas the novel is defined by the double possibility of an exteriority and an interiority, and of the free play between both.'[123] In cinema, the relationship between the outside and the inside is immediate, whereas in literature it relies on various degrees of linguistic mediation.

> To be sure, cinema is the art of appearances; the word and the image do not pursue this knowledge [psychological knowledge] in the same way. But the goal remains unchanged. What Astruc is seeking does not seem very different from Flaubert's: there is not anymore, like in classical psychology, an *inside* and an *outside*. The movements of the body, nevertheless, reveal the movements of the soul.[124]

One particular article by Astruc, 'Dialectique et cinéma', crucially suggests that as early as 1949 (that is, when the article was first published, one year after 'Cinéma, an Art of Space') the premises of Rohmer's 1950 conversion were already fully there. On the one hand, 'Dialectique et cinéma' faithfully follows Sartre's literary aesthetics as well as his philosophical approach; on the other hand, it clearly foreshadows the overcoming of both, most notably towards a return to Kant. Hence, the need to examine it in detail.

121 Astruc, 'Quand un homme'. See also his 'Notes sur la mise en scène'.

122 Untitled declaration by Astruc, published in *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision* 470 (18 Janvier 1959). Originally: 'Or, toute la psychologie classique est basée sur le fait que les apparences sont trompeuses. Je crois, moi, qu'elles ne le sont pas.'

123 Bellour, *Alexandre Astruc*, p. 33. Originally: 'Le film se définit par son extériorité, le roman par la double possibilité d'une exteriorité et d'une intériorité et d'un jeu libre entre les deux.'

124 *Ibid.*, p. 52. Originally: 'Assurément, le cinéma est l'art des apparences, le mot et l'image ne visent pas cette connaissance [la connaissance psychologique] de la même manière. Mais le but reste inchangé. Ce que cherche Astruc semble peu différent de ce que cherchait Flaubert: il n'y a plus, comme en psychologie classique, de *dedans* et de *dehors*, mais les mouvements du corps n'en livrent pas moins les mouvements de l'âme.'

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Abbreviations

CC = *Cahiers du Cinéma*
éS = *école Schérer*
pda = *politique des auteurs*
ToB = Jean Narboni and Eric Rohmer (eds.), *The Taste of Beauty*, trans. by Carol Volk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

2. Alexandre Astruc: An Early but Decisive Influence

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Abstract
This chapter sets out to clarify the influence Alexandre Astruc had on Eric Rohmer and, by extension, on the *politique des auteurs*. While it is well-known that 'Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo' (Astruc's most famous article) has been a decisive and durable influence on that critical movement, 'Dialectique et Cinéma' (a lesser known article Astruc published in 1949) was no less seminal in that context. Therefore, this chapter closely analyses 'Dialectique et Cinéma' (particularly as it substantially references Immanuel Kant, Rohmer's most important source of philosophical inspiration) before moving to a new re-interpretation of 'Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo' in the light of that other article.

Keywords: Astruc, Kant, dialectic, *stylo*

It is well known that Alexandre Astruc's article 'Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo' greatly influenced the *école Schérer* (éS) as well as the *politique des auteurs* (pda). However, it can also be argued that the éS was no less deeply struck by 'Dialectique et cinéma'. Rohmer could hardly ignore an article written by someone who, as noted earlier, at that time, was among his best friends, to say nothing of the fact that it was published in *Combat* in 1949, only a handful of months after one of Rohmer's earliest and most decisive pieces ('L'âge classique du cinéma', 'The Classical Age of Cinema') appeared in the same journal.[1] Substantial echoes of that short essay can be eventually found even in the pda years, since Jacques Rivette quoted

1 It should also be added that Eric Rohmer's personal archives, stored at the IMEC institute in Caen (Normandy), contain several newspaper clippings from various *Combat* issues of the same period (early 1949): for instance, among others, short articles by Roger Leenhardt and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze that appeared on the cinema page of that journal in the first half of that year.

this 1949 article as late as 1957.[2] Thus, it can be argued that 'Dialectique et cinéma' left a deep mark on the éS/pda.

The main reason why this piece should be regarded as an extremely important part of the history of that circle of critics, is that one year before Rohmer's conversion to Kant, it already overtly referenced the German philosopher. It is thus necessary to recall at least the most basic tenets of the latter's 'transcendental aesthetics', before delving into 'Dialectique et cinéma'. Lastly, we will turn to its more famous (and chronologically antecedent) companion piece 'Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo', an article that the more obscure 'Dialectique et cinéma' sheds a decisive light on.

2.1. Kant's transcendental aesthetics – and Heidegger's reinterpretation

For Kant, our *sensible intuitions* (for the sake of simplification: perceptions) are subjected to space and time, their a priori forms whereby things appear to us. The manifold of sensible intuitions are synthesized in a unity by *the transcendental synthesis of the imagination*. This synthesis is 'an action of the understanding upon sensibility, and is the understanding's first application (and at the same time the basis of all its other applications) to objects of the intuition that is possible for us.'[3] The *understanding* (for the sake of simplification: thought) shapes our sensible intuitions in accordance with the *categories* (the pure, a priori *concepts* of the understanding). Thanks to the action of understanding, representations and judgements can be formed. Eventually, 'the power of providing unity of the rules of understanding under principles,'[4] i.e. *reason*, also plays a part in this process.

It should be stressed that understanding informs sensible intuition (whose manifold is processed by the transcendental synthesis of the imagination) *in the first place* (and not only when judgements and more complex processes come along). The moment we perceive, say, a chair, the action of understanding is already in place, because it provides the concepts whereby

2 Rivette, 'The Hand', p. 144. Although Rivette quotes 'Cinéma et dialectique' (the follow-up piece of 'Dialectique et cinéma', published in *Combat* one week later, and eventually included in the collection *Du stylo à la caméra... et de la caméra au stylo* together with its companion piece), it would be easy to demonstrate, by drawing on the rest of Rivette's article, that in fact he meant to refer to the former one instead.

3 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B152.

4 *Ibid.*, B359.

a chair can be acknowledged as a chair. Man experiences things according to a certain (in Kantian terms, 'transcendental') mediation, but is also *objectively* bound to a mediation of a specific kind: that which makes us see things *according to a synthetic principle of unity*. This unity emerges from understanding. We do not perceive things in themselves (noumena), only appearances (phenomena), but there is a character of necessity informing the way appearances are produced, because, objectively, we are bound to receive appearances in a synthetic manner: we can analyse and dissect physical reality as much as we please, but our perception is necessarily tied to certain schemes whereby what is manifold appears unified. This is how what we know as discrete objects (more precisely, the concepts thereof) are born in our mind: thanks to this synthetic coalescence of traits. Kant tells us that we can rely on a substantial, objective a priori certitude that our apperceptions come *as unified*, and that this principle of unity is directly related to the fact that our own consciousness is *one* – which is also the key to overall unity of our experience. Without the unity of consciousness/experience/apperception ensured by understanding, no sensible intuition would be able to emerge. Therefore, sensibility and understanding indeed go together.

> *Understanding* – speaking generally – is the power of cognitions. Cognitions consist in determinate reference of given presentations to an object. And an *object* is that in whose concept the manifold of a given intuition is *united*. But all unification of presentations requires that there be unity of consciousness in the synthesis of them. Consequently the reference of presentations to an object consists solely in this unity of consciousness, and hence so does their objective validity and consequently their becoming cognitions. On this unity, consequently, rests the very possibility of the understanding.[5]

Crucially, Kant also maintains that the unity of consciousness/experience/apperception matches the *unity of nature*. Here, one should be careful: 'nature' does not mean a 'thing in itself' inaccessible by way of phenomena (appearances), but rather *the sum of all appearances*, the totality of appearances. Essentially, the 'unity of nature' is the overall coherence whereby things appear to us, that is, qua globally submitted to the mechanical laws of causes and effects. The fact that nature is globally submitted to mechanical

5 *Ibid.*, B137.

laws has to be postulated if the unity of consciousness/experience/apperception is to make any sense at all.

> Hence the order and regularity in the appearances that we call nature are brought into them by ourselves; nor indeed could such order and regularity be found in appearances, had not we, or the nature of our mind, put them into appearances originally. For this unity of nature is to be a necessary, i.e., an a priori certain, unity of the connection of appearances. But how indeed could we have the ability to institute a priori a synthetic unity, if our mind's original cognitive sources did not a priori contain subjective bases of such unity, and if these subjective conditions were not at the same time valid objectively, viz., by being the bases for the possibility of cognizing an object in experience at all?[6]

But, if understanding performs the 'transcendental synthesis of imagination', what about *imagination*? Has our account not neglected it along the way? One thing is clear, the actual place of imagination in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* has been highly controversial for centuries.

Imagination 'is the power of presenting an object in intuition even without the objects being present.'[7] It is that which mediates between sensibility and understanding: it is that which brings together the synthesis of the manifold *as such*, while the synthesis *according to concepts*, which is also inseparable from the synthesis according to the unity of consciousness/experience/apperception, is the task of understanding.

> What is first given to us is appearance. When appearance is combined with consciousness, it is called perception. (Without the relation to an at least possible consciousness, appearance could never become for us an object of cognition, and hence would be nothing to us; and since appearance does not in itself have any objective reality and exists only in cognition, it would then be nothing at all.) But because every appearance contains a manifold, so that different perceptions are in themselves encountered in the mind sporadically and individually, these perceptions need to be given a combination that in sense itself they cannot have. Hence there is in us an active power to synthesize this manifold. This power we call imagination; and the act that it performs directly on perceptions I call apprehension. For the imagination is to bring the manifold of intuition

6 *Ibid.*, A126.
7 *Ibid.*, B137.

> to an *image*; hence it must beforehand take the impressions up into its activity, i.e. apprehend them.[8]

In addition to this *reproductive* imagination, (whose synthesis is subject only to the empirical laws of association), Kant also affirms the existence of a *productive* imagination, one that is transcendental, a priori and spontaneous, in that it produces representations that are not derived from experience, but *provide* conditions of experience (that is to say, the unity of the manifold as internally relating to the unity of consciousness/experience/apperception enabled by pure understanding, rather than to objects of experience). The relation of both to understanding can be summarized as follows: '*The unity of apperception* [considered] *in reference to the synthesis of imagination* is the understanding; and the same unity as referred to the *transcendental synthesis of imagination* is *pure understanding*.'[9]

The exact relationship between imagination thus conceived and understanding has been the subject of infinite speculation. Most importantly, Martin Heidegger, undoubtedly one of Sartre's most important influences, tried to demonstrate that the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* implied that the imagination was somewhat independent and distinguished from understanding, and its 'productive' side definitely overshadowed the 'reproductive' one. Moreover, imagination *subordinated*, at least to some extent, understanding. The unity of consciousness/experience/apperception depended on the synthesis delivered by the imagination, and not the other way around. This utter primacy of the imagination, from which Kant retreated (as if he were afraid of the power of his own insight) in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, lies in the fact that imagination was the *transcendental agency of temporalization*. By being the principle whereby the manifold are synthesized in a unity, imagination provided the a priori form of arranging all the 'nows' into a sequential succession.

> Pure imagination, thus termed because it forms its images [*Gebilde*] spontaneously, must, since it is itself relative to time, constitute [form] time originally. Time as pure intuition is neither only what is intuited in the pure act of intuition nor this act itself deprived of its 'object'. Time as pure intuition is in one the formative act of intuiting and what is intuited therein. Such is the complete concept of time.[10]

8 *Ibid.*, A120.
9 *Ibid.*, A119. Emphasis is in the original.
10 Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 180.

For Kant, time is self-affection. As per Kant's definition, the self can only experience itself as appearance and not in itself. Imagination is time affecting itself: the power of making the manifold into a sequential succession being exerted on something necessarily different from itself. This is where experience enters the picture: experience qua temporalized enters, as it were, the slot self-affection cannot help but prepare for it.

This reading of Kant clearly interweaves the latter's philosophy with issues pertaining to Heidegger's own agenda, like finitude and Being. Man is characterized by finitude (which also means that man's mode of Being lies in the separation from Being) in that it is characterized by temporality, so imagination qua the source of temporality is also the key to man's finitude. This is evident, for instance, in the following passage, extensively formulating the same point as the passage quoted above:

> Time is pure intuition only in that it spontaneously preforms the aspect of succession and, as an act both receptive and formative, pro-poses this aspect as such to itself. This pure intuition solicits itself [*geht sich an*] by that which it intuits (forms) and without the aid of experience. Time is, by nature, pure affection of itself. But more than this, it is that in general which forms something on the order of a line of orientation which going from the self is directed toward [...] in such a way that the objective thus constituted springs forth and surges back along this line. As pure self-affection, time is not an active affection concerned with the concrete self; as pure, it forms the essence of all auto-solicitation. Therefore, if the power of being solicited as a self belongs to the essence of the finite subject, time as pure self-affection forms the essential structure of subjectivity. Only on the basis of this selfhood can a finite being be what it must be: a being dependent on receptivity.[11]

For Heidegger, Kant's imagination is the key to the fact that Being is finitude, and that finitude, as temporalizing being-in-the-world (*Dasein*), is what is most primordial in man.

In his *The Imaginary*, heavily indebted to Heidegger, Sartre went even further, and distinguished even more radically imagination from perception, thereby (implicitly) rejecting Kant more strongly than Heidegger's rather eccentric reading did. Indeed, imagination, according to Sartre, is *nihilation*, a withdrawal from Being that is also, simultaneously, the most authentic form of Being man can aspire to (Heidegger's *Dasein*, albeit different in

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

certain respects, is clearly not far away). It is through imagination (that is, nihilation), *as opposed to perception*, that I can attain freedom, by opening up the possibility of future action, oriented toward a goal (a *project*), while, by the same token, establishing a relatively self-determined past from which action takes off. As we have seen, for Sartre, freedom is a temporalization, and this idea deeply affects his theory of the novel. For him, this is meant to recreate man's temporality qua fundamentally marked by contingency (hence, in Sartrean terms, freedom). In a sense, Heidegger's appropriation of Kant's imagination (qua temporalizing agent) lies at the very core of Sartre's view of the novel.

2.2. 'Dialectique et cinéma'

Let us return to Astruc's article.

> It is as if cinematic viewing imposed an a priori structure on the work; exactly like in Kant's philosophy, the human spirit puts things in a priori frameworks of understanding. Because it is a moment within a movement, no image of a film can be a thing in itself, without meaning and only pertaining to the category of identity. Far from being a self-sufficient and passive whole, it is none other than an instant whose meaning only appears in light of a past and a future. That is, of a story and a project.[12]

These lines commence with Kant, progress with Heidegger, and end with Sartre. Astruc says that while human spirit seizes the world only in compliance with the a priori frame of understanding, cinema does so in compliance with a basic principle of temporalization. Cinema does not show any 'thing': it does not provide a disorderly wealth of sensations to be unified by the understanding according to concepts, for instance when we attach the concept of a chair to a certain set of sensations, thereby acknowledging them all as 'a chair'. Of course, spectators *also* do so, insofar as whoever watches a film consciously recognizes a certain number of objects shown

12 Astruc, 'Dialectique et cinéma', p. 337. Originally: 'Tout se passe comme si la vision cinématographique imposait à l'oeuvre un cadre à priori; exactement comme dans la philosophie de Kant, l'esprit humain fait rentrer les choses dans le cadre a priori de l'entendement. Parce qu'elle est un moment d'un mouvement, aucune image de film n'est une chose en soi, sans signification en ne relevant que de la catégorie de l'identité. Loin d'être un tout passif et suffisant à soi, elle n'est qu'un instant dont la signification n'apparaît qu'à la lumière d'un passé et d'un futur. C'est à dire d'un histoire et d'un projet.'

therein, by attaching the relevant concepts, thanks to understanding (not to mention reason, etc.). However, this is *not* the most fundamental aspect of cinema. Cinema shows *moving* images. At every instant, it primarily shows a moment in time that only makes sense in relation to what follows and what precedes it. Only secondarily does it show 'discreet objects'. A moving image is nothing but a moment in a series: it is the outcome of temporalization. Cinema is 'the art of movement',[13] hence it is a temporal art: it puts things in a temporal sequence. Precisely as such, it strikingly matches Kant's imagination qua temporalization, viz. Kant's imagination qua appropriated by Heidegger. Cinema enacts the transcendental synthesis of the imagination, synthesizing the manifold (frames, shot, scenes and whatever kind of fragment cinema comes across) into a flow (albeit only understanding can eventually acknowledge it as a flow – more on this later). Indeed, the above passage echoes *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* almost literally

> As the pure succession of the now-series, time is 'in constant flux'. Pure intuition intuits this succession unobjectively. To intuit means: to receive that which offers itself. Pure intuition gives to itself, in the receptive act, that which is capable of being received. [...] The receptive act of pure intuition must in itself give the aspect of the *now* in such a way that it looks ahead to the *just coming* and back to the *just passing*.[14]

That this temporalization is envisaged as 'a project', is obviously due to Sartre's influence (which was still strong on Astruc at that time). Astruc does not at all shy away from the 'Sartrean' analogy between this kind of temporalization and that which takes place while reading a novel, and overtly posits this analogy in the text. More generally, Astruc seems to conceive cinema in terms of Heidegger's Kant.

In the following chapters, whenever 'cinema as externalized imagination' is mentioned, this turn of phrase will refer to the conception implicit in Astruc's article, according to which cinematic apparatus is an embodiment of Kant's imagination (the faculty synthesizing the manifold) qua reinterpreted by Heidegger. It will broadly refer to the complex of practices (whose ultimate outcome is the film strip) intervening between the shooting and the moment when the film is screened in front of an audience; that is, when the synthesis of the manifold of appearance into a series (typically the imagination's task)

13 Astruc, 'Dialectique et cinéma', p. 337. Originally: 'L'art du mouvement'.
14 Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, pp. 178-179.

meets the joint action of the viewer's sensibility/understanding/reason, acknowledging it as a unified flow.[15] Astruc implies not only that cinema is the mechanical embodiment of Heidegger/Kant's imagination (organizing the manifold ensuing from sensible intuition – that is, whatever kind of fragment has been filmed – into a virtual flow) apart from understanding, but also that it *needs* understanding (qua transcendentally informing sensibility) in order to exist at all. The film is the mechanical embodiment of human imagination (a pure flow of fragments), but if it does not get screened and seen, it is just nothing at all.

> Because a film is as much a roll of film as a novel is a closed book, left on a bedside table. It exists only to the extent that we screen it, just as a novel exists only when read, that is to say that cinema can only be when the eye associates and unites several cinematic images with one another, by providing them with a temporal dimension.[16]

On the one hand, the unity of the manifold prescinds from the unity of consciousness/experience/apperception (ensured by understanding), in that cinema is the embodiment of imagination qua detached from the understanding. On the other hand, it needs them in order to exist. It needs a unitary consciousness for which the film exists. In other words: it needs 'human spectators, that is to say, […] beings for whom and through whom time is a component of the world.'[17]

One could object that long before the sensibility/understanding/reason of the viewer meet this synthesis of the imagination, the sensibility/understanding/reason of everyone implied in the making of the film (first of all its author) have already affected this supposedly separate action of cinema's externalized imagination; such an objection would, of course, be justifiable, but would also miss the point. Why? I shall get to an explanation by degrees.

15 Indeed, the concept of 'cinema, qua externalized imagination' must be left in its generality, rather than identified with a single and definite practice like, say, montage – not only because Astruc never really did so, but also because an 'externalized imagination' to be accordingly conceived in terms of montage alone cannot but be heavily influenced by all the phases coming before (the writing, the shooting, etc.) and after (the moment when the film is actually seen by someone).

16 Astruc, 'Dialectique et cinéma', p. 338. Originally: 'Car un film n'est pas plus un rouleau de pellicule qu'un roman est un livre fermé, abandonné sur une table de nuit. Il n'existe que dans la mesure où il est projeté comme un roman n'existe que lu, c'est-à-dire en d'autres termes qu'il n'y a cinéma que lorsque l'oeil associe plusieurs images cinématographiques et, leur donnant la dimension temporelle, les prolonge les unes dans les autres.'

17 Astruc, 'Dialectique et cinéma', p. 337. Originally: 'spectateur humains, c'est-à-dire d'êtres pour qui et par qui il y a du temps dans le monde.'

Crucially, in Heidegger, the whole process of cognition is ultimately led by, above all, temporalizing imagination; accordingly, in Astruc's model, too, the temporalization ensuing from cinema's externalized imagination decisively drives the overall experience of the spectator.

> Even composed of still images, placed end-to-end without any connection between them, a film passes, temporally, and in a certain direction. It unfurls from the beginning to the end of itself and, by its essence as film, acquires an internal link which is precisely given by its duration. This relation is not necessarily logical, it is in fact dialectical, and inherent to whatever film, so that there can never be an isolated image in cinema; even if such order does not exist in the creator's thought, the temporal dimension creates it.[18]

Thus, in cinema, the dimension of *time* leads the way – an *irreversible* time, at that. After light has impressed the film strip in a way that is optically similar to human perception (the shooting qua assimilated to 'sensible intuition'), cinema makes the ensuing manifold of appearances (the frames, the shots, the scenes – whatever kind of fragment is available) into a virtual flow, and binds meaning to this mechanical, irreversible flow (everything depends on what comes before and after). Astruc, in a Heideggerian fashion, seems to imply that, to some extent, the joint action of sensibility and understanding (on the part of the viewer) is driven by (the cinematic embodiment of) the imagination, and not the other way around. Usually, the understanding arranges phenomena according to its categories – among which, causality. This means that it orders them according to a necessary, objective succession following the laws of causality (A causes B, which causes C, and so on). Vis-à-vis cinema, this ordering is, as it were, anticipated by cinema's externalized imagination, synthesizing the manifold of appearances into a series to be unravelled in the mechanical, *irreversible* time of the projection; this irreversibility, in a sense, fosters and predisposes in advance the character of causal necessity to be bestowed by understanding once the latter acknowledges it as a unified succession.

18 *Ibid.* Originally: 'Même composé d'images immobiles, mises bout à bout sans liaison entre elles, un film s'écoule temporellement et a un sens défini. Il va du commencement à la fin de lui-même et, par son essence de film, il acquiert un lien interne qui lui est précisément donné par sa durée. [...] Au cinéma il n'y a jamais d'image isolée; même si cet ordre n'existe pas dans la pensée du créateur, la dimension temporelle la crée.'

> The human eye in front of which this movement of images develops builds links with one another because movement necessarily involves a connection. It secretes a thread along which images inflate and puts each one of them on the twofold perspective of a past that once occurred, and of a future to come. Each element of this spatiality in motion is linked to all those elements preceding or following it, and this precisely because it is being preceded and followed. Without the need to provoke it with artificial means, the eye establishes a natural connection between the images of a film, and sets them in a duration that gives them meaning.[19]

In this respect, creators are on the same side as viewers. Creative contributions of any kind must inescapably comply with the fact that the final result has to be a 'sequentialization' unfolding through an irreversible time – in that sense, too, imagination (the externalized imagination of cinema) 'comes first', as it decisively drives and affects every creative contribution the sensibility/understanding/reason of anyone involved in the process might bring about. An author, a director or whoever claims control over a film may well organize the footage according to some creative principle (naturally falling under understanding – and reason), but he or she must still comply with the temporal *irreversibility* whereby the film's sequential succession unfolds, fundamentally conditioning whatever kind of control one might choose to impose on the material to be screened. Only in this way can cinema reveal 'the abstract element which organises it, whether it be an idea, a passion or an obsession.'[20] This is why the viewer and the creator (every creator implied in the process) are to be thought of as sharing the same side.

The whole point is the distinction between imagination (qua mechanically embodied by cinema) and understanding (brought about by the living consciousness experiencing or shaping the moving images, and essentially driven in both cases by the temporal irreversibility the projection produces), in compliance with Heidegger's stance on Kant. Not incidentally, the first

19 *Ibid.* Originally: 'L'oeil human devant lequel se déroule ce mouvement d'images les lie les unes aux autres parce que le mouvement implique nécessairement la liaison. Il secrète un fil le long duquel s'enflent les images et inscrit chacune d'elles dans la double perspective d'un passé qui a eu lieu et d'un futur à venir. Chaque élément de cette spatialité en mouvement est lié à tous ceux qui le précèdent ou le suivent, et ceci précisément parce qu'ils le précèdent ou le suivent. Sans qu'il y ait besoin de la provoquer par des moyens artificiels, l'oeil établit naturellement une liaison entre les images d'un film et les enchassent dans une durée qui leur donne un sens.'

20 Astruc, 'Dialectique et cinéma', p. 338. Originally: 'L'élément abstrait qui l'organise, que ce soit celle d'une idée, d'une passion ou d'une obsession.'

passage by Astruc quoted above stated that man's consciousness imposes on the world the frame of understanding, *whereas* cinema makes it into a temporal sequence. On the other hand, Astruc insists that neither of these two faculties is conceivable without the other. Cinema is a temporalizing machine, and this makes it an embodiment of imagination; nevertheless, it still needs what it subordinates, viz. a viewer and/or a creator, in that both contribute sensibility qua necessarily informed by the unity of consciousness/experience/apperception ensured by the understanding.

This no doubt contributes to the explanation of why Rohmer so often[21] reiterated that cinema should stay clear of ellipses – a rejection that could otherwise be explained simply by their being a somewhat typically literary technique, manipulating the timeline of the story in order to achieve definite expressive effects, and trying to express some content by means of allusions and a cunning use of the 'unsaid', rather than displaying 'appearance for appearance's sake', which by definition reveals with no need to conceal anything. Ellipses clearly rely on a contingent temporality (typically, the temporality of the novel), that is, on a narrative timeline that is liable to be broken and recomposed at will. But according to 'Dialectique et cinéma', cinema's irreversible time pushes the viewer to establish a chain of causal connections marked by necessity: in front of the screen, the synthetic bestowal of a linear flow prevails over intellectual analysis. An ellipsis consists of moving from a moment A to a moment C while skipping a moment B that is logically placed between them, so that the viewer is obliged to mentally reconstruct what took place between A and C. However, as argued by André Bazin (whom Astruc introduced to Rohmer in the late 1940s), in an article he published in 1945,[22] the very functioning of cinema consists of bridging these gaps *all the time*: discontinuous frames merge into a seemingly continuous flow, as much as every other kind of fragment the film is made of morphs into a continuity posited by the viewer in the wake of the irreversible time of the projection. While reading a novel, the omitted B moment can be reconstructed intellectually a posteriori after C, simply because one is in control of one's reading time: the reader can stop, think, read back, resume reading, and so on and so forth, in whatever order, and no matter how long each of these actions takes. In front of a screen, *there is no time to do this*: the only moment that counts is the next one, which, every time, is to be bridged with whatever moment precedes. When C comes along, it must be quickly linked with

21 For instance, in Chapter one of this volume, in the first quotation from his 'L'âge du roman américain'.

22 Bazin, 'A propos de *L'Espoir*, ou du style au cinéma'.

whatever moment came before (be it A or B), before D (or even, say, P) turns up immediately thereafter. It follows, says Bazin, that there can be no real difference, on the screen, between bridging A with C or bridging A with B,[23] so ellipses, the way one is accustomed to conceive them in literature, simply do not work on the screen. The viewer is automatically driven *at all time* to posit a continuity between *whatever* discontinuous elements are presented, thereby systematically defusing the very effect of ambiguity and indeterminacy upon which ellipses and their power to indirectly allude rest. Hence, for this line of thought (connecting, at least in this particular respect, Bazin with Astruc and Rohmer), ellipses are inherently anti-cinematic.

Astruc's claim that the connection emerging by placing the manifold into a sequence (which cinematic imagination regularly does) 'is not necessarily logical, it is in fact dialectical'[24] should be read in a similar vein. In the final part of his article, he writes that 'cinema is only possible through movement, which gives an internal logic to a certain succession of cinematic images. For this reason, there is no movement without a linking process. Finally, there is no cinema without dialectic.'[25] The crucial part here is 'there is no movement without a linking process'. It means that imagination, qua pure synthesis of the manifold, *drives* the category of causality, in compliance with Heidegger's idea that, in fact, Kant's imagination subordinates sensibility and understanding. Because irreversible movement by itself makes succession into an *orderly*, *oriented* succession, 'this and that' automatically becomes 'that because of this'.

23 This conception helps explain an otherwise fairly obscure passage quoted in the first issue of the third year (1950) of the *Bulletin intérieur du Ciné-club du Quartier Latin*, namely a brief praise of continuity editing in the short films by Anthony Barrier (the pseudonym for none other than Eric Rohmer) that Bazin is reported to have published some months before in *Cinémonde* movie magazine: 'What can be discerned behind the deliberate banality of montage is not really a return to the origins and a refusal to employ the widespread cinematic device of ellipsis, but rather a concern to push elliptical style to its extreme consequences. In this film, there is a continual ellipsis of ellipsis itself [...].' Originally: 'Dans la banalité voulue du découpage, je vois non pas tant un retour aux origines et un refus d'user de cette figure cinématographique courante qu'est l'ellipse qu'un souci de pousser le style elliptique jusqu'à ses extreme conséquences. Il y a dans ce film, une ellipse continuelle de l'ellipse même [...].'. Cinema has no need to employ ellipses in the literary sense, because its own regular functioning lies in bridging holes at *all* times. It does away with ellipses because in the cinema ellipses are *everywhere*: it is in a position to elide ellipses themselves in that it pushes elliptical style to its extreme consequences.

24 Astruc, 'Dialectique et cinéma', p. 338. Originally: '[...] n'est pas forcément logique, en fait il est dialectique.'

25 *Ibid*. Originally: 'Il n'y a pas cinéma sans une logique interne conférée par le mouvement à une certaine succession d'images cinématographiques, pour cette raison qu'il n'est pas de mouvement sans liaison. Autrement dit, enfin, il n'y a pas de cinéma sans dialectique.'

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, 'dialectic' is essentially 'a logic of illusion.'[26] On the one hand, 'general logic analyzes the whole formal business of understanding and reason into its elements, and exhibits these elements as principles governing all logical judging of our cognition.'[27] On the other hand though,

> the mere form of cognition, however much it may agree with logical laws, is far from being sufficient to establish that a cognition is true objectively (materially). Hence with mere logic no one can venture to make judgments about objects and assert anything about them. Rather, we must first go outside logic to obtain well-based information about objects, in order then to attempt merely employing this information and connecting it in a coherent whole in accordance with logical laws, or-better yet-in order only to test the information by these laws. Yet there is something very tempting about possessing so plausible an art, whereby we give to all our cognitions the form of our understanding—even though we may still be very empty-handed and poor as regards the cognition's content. So great is this temptation that this general logic, which is merely a canon for judging, has been used-like an organon, as it were-for the actual production of at least deceptive objective assertions, and thus has in fact been misused. Now general logic, when used as supposed organon, is called dialectic.[28]

Astruc calls cinema 'dialectic' precisely because it engenders a temporal succession automatically characterized by causal necessity due to the irreversibility of its temporal unfolding, *and uses this power as an organon*, in order to produce a deceptive logical concatenation unfolding on the screen. 'So plausible an art,' cinema creates a mechanical semblance of necessity that is not only formal (like general logic), but also attached to a certain content (viz. whatever is shown in the images that unfold on the screen), whose 'necessary' deployment cannot but be illusory. In contrast with general logic, which 'teaches us nothing whatever about the content of cognition; it teaches us merely the formal conditions for the agreement [of cognition] with the understanding, and these conditions are wholly inconsequential otherwise, i.e., as regards the [cognition's] objects,'[29] cinema, like dialectic, *cheats* on logic by improperly extending it to empirical objects.

26 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A293.
27 *Ibid.*, A60.
28 *Ibid.*, A60-61.
29 *Ibid.*, A61.

Thus we should read Astruc's quotation above: cinema is movement, movement engenders a succession automatically characterized by a kind of *illusory necessity* thanks to the mechanical, indifferent irreversibility of its temporal unfolding, so this succession is dialectical (it is a 'logic of illusion'). Hence, cinema is dialectical.

However, one must hasten to add that, for Kant, dialectic is not just a bunch of junk thoughts. (Transcendental) dialectic is also the name for a *critique* of dialectical illusion.[30] Dialectic is not just illusory: it is a *necessary* illusion, an illusion we cannot help but fall prey to, due to the very way our reason is shaped.[31] Thus, the word 'dialectic' (more to the point, transcendental dialectic) refers not only to 'idle chatter [...] in no way compatible with the dignity of philosophy,'[32] but also to the very uncovering of those illusions.

Of course, this has little to do with what Astruc is trying to say here. Astruc is simply claiming that the illusory (viz. 'dialectical') but *somehow actual nonetheless* (because our faculties cannot help but posit it) logical and causal necessity brought forth by cinema is what makes the latter a means of expression of thought. Cinema conveys 'the abstract element which organises it, whether it be an idea, a passion or an obsession' by means of the irreversible temporal succession it puts together, and 'articulates the real and thinks through its material just as the language of words submits the organic to the logical and bears the stamp of the intelligible. Now, it is this very movement that allows cinema to become a medium for expressing thought, because it is precisely that which makes it, fundamentally, a language.'[33] One must take care not to conclude from this passage that Astruc is merely saying that cinema is a language. Rather, he is saying that

30 *Ibid.*, A62.

31 'Hence the transcendental dialectic will settle for uncovering the illusion of transcendent judgments, and for simultaneously keeping it from deceiving us. But that the illusion should even vanish as well (as does logical illusion) and cease to be an illusion-this the transcendental dialectic can never accomplish. For here we are dealing with a natural and unavoidable illusion that itself rests on Subjective principles and foists them on us as objective ones, whereas a logical dialectic in resolving fallacious inferences deals only with a mistake in the compliance with principles, or with an artificial illusion created in imitating such inferences. Hence there is a natural and unavoidable dialectic of pure reason. This dialectic is not one in which a bungler might become entangled on his own through lack of knowledge, or one that some sophist has devised artificially in order to confuse reasonable people. It is, rather, a dialectic that attaches to human reason unpreventably and that, even after we have uncovered this deception, still will not stop hoodwinking and thrusting reason incessantly into momentary aberrations that always need to be removed.' Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A298-B355.

32 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A62.

33 Astruc, 'Dialectique et cinéma', p. 338. Originally: '[Il] articule le réel et raisonne sa matière tout comme le langage des mots plie l'organique à la logique et le marque du sceau de l'intelligible.

cinema can only be a language *insofar as it is driven by movement*, viz. as it relies on the synthesis of the manifold performed by imagination (rather than on understanding, as would normally be the case of language). It can express something only by radically twisting the premises of expression themselves (precisely like that called 'manifestation' in the previous chapter). Only under that condition can cinema be a *caméra-stylo*.

2.3. From and beyond Sartre's Heideggerian perspective

Before dealing with 'Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo', it is necessary to highlight the thorough *ambiguity* of 'Dialectique et cinéma''s positioning. On the one hand, Astruc conceives cinema as the equivalent of Kant's imagination the way Heidegger read it (that is, as a temporalizing agent), and basically in compliance with Sartre's views on the novel, itself revolving around the temporalization brought about by imagination, whereby a project is engendered in freedom and contingency. On the other hand, this conception of cinema as the equivalent of Kant's imagination the way Heidegger read it *is simply incompatible with Heidegger's framework*. Kant's imagination the way Heidegger read it is a temporalizing power *within* man, grounding *man*'s finitude. Cinema, qua the equivalent of Kant's imagination according to Astruc (as the pure power of synthesizing the manifold of appearance), is *external* and *inhuman*. Man only activates through sensibility and understanding an imagination that lies *outside of* man. This ultimately discombobulates the distinction (which Heidegger himself stubbornly struggled to articulate) between time 'in me' and time 'as such', 'between the individuated temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) of *Dasein* – the time which is in each case mine – and the Temporality (*Temporalität*) of being in general,'[34] between *Dasein*'s *ekstasis* of time (the 'stepping beyond' whereby one accesses temporalization, thereby founding one's being-in-the-world) and *ekstema* (the 'horizon' of ekstasis, 'that with which transcendence encompasses and delimits the bounds of its own stepping-beyond'[35]). According to Astruc's perspective, cinema qua the equivalent of Kant's imagination the way Heidegger read it engenders an external time, one that is *irreversible* and *not mine* (even though only I can enable it), hence quite distinct from *Dasein*.

Or, c'est ce mouvement qui permet au cinéma de devenir un moyen d'expression de la pensée, car c'est lui qui en fait fondamentalement un langage.'

34 Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, p. 155.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 157.

It can be argued that Astruc's article ultimately subscribes to Kant's conflation between 'objective succession' (the fact that one thing B necessarily follows another thing A in a sequence) and causality, but only after an Heideggerian detour envisaging the primacy of succession. In Kant, imagination performs the synthesis of the manifold of appearances, but the outcome is not an ordered succession: it is only the understanding that imposes an order (an objective succession) *and* a system of causes and effects to it.[36] In Heidegger, the temporalization performed by imagination engenders a succession characterized by a contingent order that is *the key to* the understanding's activity itself (whereby unity and necessity are provided). Cinema according to Astruc does what Kant's Heidegger's imagination does, *minus the human contingency informing temporalization*: it is a temporal succession driving causality, but precisely because it already imposes from the outset (thanks to the mechanical, indifferent irreversibility of cinema's temporal unfolding) to the moments of the series the character of necessity the understanding is expected to eventually provide. Put differently, cinema according to Astruc is a *subjective* succession (of frames, scenes, etc. that can be edited together in whatever way) acquiring a character of necessity (hence becoming objective) from the very fact that it follows an order (*whatever* order) unfolding (once this succession is played out and projected) according to an irreversibility principle that is apart from the temporalizing, contingent imagination of men. Thereby, Kant's conflation between objective succession and causality is maintained, but only by taking a different route (Heidegger's).

Tellingly, no 'incompatibility issue' of the kind outlined above arises in the case of Sartre's fairly Heideggerian view of the novel (revolving around imagination qua firmly distinguished from perception). The space-time of the novel emerges in the mind of the reader, thanks to a temporalization enacted by the reader's imagination *along with* understanding. Clearly, in the reading process imagination and understanding work together – a process in which perception obviously plays little part. In an unmistakable nod to Sartre, Astruc compares cinema's temporalization with the temporalization of a 'project', and openly acknowledges that cinema temporalizes its matter like novels do. However, Astruc also heads in the opposite direction. To conceive cinema as the externalization of (Heidegger's view of) Kant's imagination means to embrace and, at the same time, undermine Sartre's firm distinction between imagination and perception: to make imagination

36 In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, this is explained in the Second Analogy of Experience (Principle of Temporal Succession According to the Law of Causality).

the object of perception means to push their detachment to its extremes, but also to reunite them by the same token (what the viewer sees is, precisely, *imagination at work*). Similarly, Astruc maintains that cinema is a temporal art (like Sartre's novel), but undoes the Sartrean knot between temporality and contingency by insisting on necessity instead. This makes his argument closer to Rohmer's view of cinema as 'an art of space', as outlined in the previous chapter.

2.4. The 'Camera-Stylo'

As previously said, Rivette quoted 'Dialectique et cinéma' in the mid-Fifties, and it is most likely that Rohmer knew it too. It thus appears that 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo' (published in March 1948 in *L'Ecran français*) is not the only article by Astruc to have considerably influenced the éS/pda. Moreover, these two articles are linked by an 'umbilical cord', namely a passage right in the middle of 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde' encapsulating in advance the short essay that appeared only 14 months later: 'One of the fundamental phenomena of the last few years has been the growing realisation of the dynamic, i.e. significant, character of the cinematic image. Every film, because its primary function is to move, i.e. to take place in time, is a theorem. It is a series of images which, from one end to the other, have an inexorable logic (or better even, a dialectic) of their own.'[37]

Indisputably, then, there is a strong connection between the two pieces of writing. It could even be argued (even though there is no direct, definite evidence in support of such claim) that Astruc wrote 'Dialectique et cinéma' in order to clarify what he really meant in 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde' – or at least as a prolongation, a spin-off thereof. Be that as it may, by reading them alongside each other, one realizes that they definitely shed reciprocal light. By taking into account the virtual presence of the ideas eventually expressed in 'Dialectique et cinéma' *within* 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde', it becomes clear that the latter can by no means be confused with a plain statement in favour of cinema as a means to express one's thought. Such an idea would be rather banal, and hardly novel: already in the 1920s (and possibly even before then), similar claims were rather widespread in movie magazines and within film culture in general. Thus, it is hard to believe that the pda looked at that article in such a simplistic way. In all likelihood,

37 Astruc, 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde', p. 34.

they were perfectly aware of its *actual* point, i.e. the one emerging from a closer reading, and by fully acknowledging the importance of that later article, 'Dialectique et cinéma'.

The point of 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde' is not *that* cinema can express thought, but *how* it does so. It makes a distinction between two different ways for cinema to be a language ('a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts'). One way is behind cinema's back: the 'heavy associations of images that were the delight of the silent cinema' (for example, falling leaves followed by apple trees in blossom in order to suggest the passing of time). The 'old avant-garde', encompassing among others Sergei Eisenstein, the surrealists, the poetic documentaries and the abstract films of the 1920s, is 'the slave of a static conception of the image,' whilst the other way, the veritable way of the 'caméra-stylo', entirely revolves around *movement* (qua the backbone of the necessity-marked sequentiality of which cinema, qua externalized imagination, consists).

> We have come to realise that the meaning which the silent cinema tried to give birth to through symbolic association exists within the image itself, in the development of the narrative, in every gesture of the characters, in every line of dialogue, in those camera movements which relate objects to objects and characters to objects. All thought, like all feeling, is a relationship between one human being and another human being or certain objects which form part of his universe. It is by clarifying these relationships, by making a tangible allusion, that the cinema can really make itself the vehicle of thought. From today onwards, it will be possible for the cinema to produce works which are equivalent, in their profundity and meaning, to the novels of Faulkner and Malraux, to the essays of Sartre and Camus. Moreover we already have a significant example: Malraux's *L'Espoir*, the film which he directed from his own novel, in which, perhaps for the first time ever, film language is the exact equivalent of literary language.[38]

Astruc's point here is very close to 'Cinema, an Art of Space': cinema is more novelistic than the novel itself, because instead of conveying meaning through language, it inscribes the temporal sequentiality, bringing about meaning *in space*, i.e. in a series of visual relationships. 'In this kind of film-making the distinction between author and director loses all meaning,' because the latter, as the 'inscriber' of these spatial relationships, is like a

38 *Ibid.*

writer: 'direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of writing. The film-maker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen.'[39] It is important to stress that a few sentences ahead of this claim, Astruc makes clear that what interests the new avant-garde is no longer the *static* visual dream of the surrealists (and the like), but 'problems such as the translation into cinematic terms of verbal tenses and logical relationships.'[40] In other words: the inscription of time in space ('the translation into cinematic terms of verbal tenses') and the unfolding of a causally necessary succession ('logical relationships'). Astruc and Rohmer incite us to think of these two aspects together: *necessity* (as opposed to the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign in all its forms, including the static, associative combination of images in order to produce a definite meaning) qualifies *either* the spatiality wherein a temporal succession is 'carved', *and* temporal succession qua marked by irreversibility thanks to cinema's externalized imagination.

Here, one can detect a significant divergence between Astruc and the éS (to which he never really belonged, as well as he never really belonged to the pda). 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde' affirmed that cinema,

> although blessed with an enormous potential, is an easy prey to prejudice; it cannot go on for ever ploughing the same field of realism and social fantasy which has been bequeathed to it by the popular novel. It can tackle any subject, any genre. The most philosophical meditations on human production, psychology, metaphysics, ideas, and passions lie well within its province. [...] But with the development of 16mm and television, the day is not far off when everyone will possess a projector, will go to the local bookstore and hire films written on any subject, of any form, from literary criticism and novels to mathematics, history, and general science. From that moment on, it will no longer be possible to speak of *the* cinema. There will be *several* cinemas just as today there are several literatures, for the cinema, like literature, is not so much a particular art as a language which can express any sphere of thought.[41]

Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer and Truffaut were more conservative: they really were only interested in cinema qua physiological prolongation of the realist novel of the nineteenth century. They seemingly took very

39 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
40 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
41 *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

seriously Rohmer's divide between manifestation and expression, and believed that cinema could be more novelistic than the novel itself only insofar as it manifested rather than expressed. Astruc's position is more mixed: to some extent, the expression of thought, and even self-expression, always remained among the main premises of his writing and filming practices.[42] This ambiguity is attested in, among others, 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde' itself – an article seemingly endorsing a conception of cinema as the expression of thought *in terms of self-expression*. Later, 'Dialectique et cinéma' suggests instead that cinema, as externalized imagination, brings about an irreversible succession that *automatically* produces thought (thanks to the character of necessity bestowed by the irreversibility of that unfolding), which does not necessarily mean it is *somebody's* thought in particular being expressed, but rather that a kind of thought, a kind of logic, is played out no matter what the original intentions are, thanks to a sequentiality unfolding in an irreversible and hence seemingly necessary way (film, as Astruc wrote in 'Dialectique et cinéma', 'unfurls from the beginning to the end of itself and, by its essence as film, acquires an internal link which is precisely given by its duration[, and is] inherent to whatever film [...]; even if such order does not exist in the creator's thought, the temporal dimension creates it'). The inspiration the éS/pda drew from 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde' seems to have less to do with the simple idea of cinema as a language whereby one could express oneself, than with the idea that it is a language *only insofar as it is not really a language*, i.e. as it complies with movement and all that ensues from it (the 'dialectical', inexorable logic brought about by the irreversibility of the unfolding, etc.). There is a rift, then, separating the otherwise close éS/pda and Astruc. As late as 1998, Jean-Luc Godard was still at pains (in a voice-over in his *Histoire(s) du cinéma*) to highlight the differences between them. 'The camera-stylo, it was Sartre who urged the idea onto the young Alexandre Astruc, so that the camera fell under the guillotine of meaning, never to recover again' (my translation). Forty years before, when the French New Wave was about to burst in, Truffaut 'repudiated' Astruc and wrote a negative review of his new film, after he had praised all his previous ones.[43]

On the other hand, no doubt they agreed that cinema had to be more novelistic than the novel itself. But here, too, 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde' is less clear-cut than it seems.

42 In this regard, see for instance his 'L'avenir du cinéma'.

43 Truffaut, 'Astruc a manqué *Une vie*'.

> Maurice Nadeau wrote in an article in the newspaper *Combat*: 'If Descartes lived today, he would write novels'. With all due respect to Nadeau, a Descartes of today would already have shut himself up in his bedroom with a 16mm camera and some film, and would be writing his philosophy on film: for his *Discours de la Methode* would today be of such a kind that only the cinema could express it satisfactorily.[44]

Yet, such formulation, on closer view, begs the question whether a Cartesian cogito with a camera in one's hands can still be regarded as a Cartesian cogito at all. In his *Discourse on Method* (1637), Descartes stated that he could doubt anything around him, but not his own consciousness, precisely because his own consciousness is that which does the doubting in the first place. A pen and a piece of paper can easily account for such an inner experience of self-awareness – but what about a movie camera? Is it (according to Rohmer himself, as we have seen in the previous chapter) not incapable of showing anything but the external side of things? How could it ever cope with a cogito-like kind of self-acquaintance? Rather, if anything, an attempt to enact the cogito by brandishing a movie camera, whatever way one used it, would immediately lay bare the radical *inaccessibility* of the subject to itself by means of self-reflection. No matter what the camera is used for, and how, it would still beget nothing but appearances. It would be, if anything, a *refutation* of Cartesian cogito (as well as, by extension, of Sartre's reconsideration of it), and would point at a non-Cartesian kind of self-reflection instead – for instance one that, like Kant's, radically denies the subject the possibility to actually access itself through self-reflection (more on this in the next chapter).

It follows that Astruc's reference to Descartes in his article is not to be taken to the letter, but as a paradox. Precisely by turning to the *Discourse on Method*, Astruc implies that camera-stylo is ultimately anti-Cartesian: although Astruc openly says that Descartes would put his *Discourse* on film, the anti-Cartesian character of such an hypothetical endeavour is too blatant for Astruc's claim not to be turned upside down.

The same goes for 'Dialectique et cinéma'. On the one hand, that article theorizes cinema in terms that are very close to Heidegger's appropriation of Kant's imagination (qua synthesizing the manifold of appearances and hence qua the agent of temporalization), and (thus) to Sartre's view of the novel; on the other hand, it points at a way *out* of them, a way the éS/pda

44 Astruc, 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde', p. 33.

will follow in various ways. This contradiction is overly apparent, and even though Astruc did not voice it as such, 'Dialectique et cinéma' and 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde' (itself an article that is less about cinema qua language whereby to express one's vision, than it is about *the kind of non-linguistic, non-expressive, movement-driven, necessity-oriented language* cinema is and can only be) lay the foundation for Rohmer's and the others' subsequent rejection of Sartre's Cartesian/Heideggerian perspective.

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Abbreviations

éS = *école Schérer*
pda = *politique des auteurs*

3. Under and On the Volcano: Rohmer's Conversion

Grosoli, Marco, *Eric Rohmer's Film Theory (1948-1953). From 'école Schérer' to 'Politique des auteurs'*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

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Abstract
In 1983, having watched *Stromboli* (Roberto Rossellini, 1949) for the first time, Eric Rohmer declared that he had decided to abandon, once and for all, the Sartrean influence that had hitherto been so important for him. This chapter explains this conversion by way of a close analysis of the film, and describes the extent to which it shaped Rohmer's subsequent vision and theory of cinema. *Stromboli*, can be divided into two parts: one alluding to Sartre's notion of freedom qua emancipation from the gaze of the Other, while the other, adumbrating Kant's notion of the Sublime and his views on ethics more generally, squarely moves away from Sartre and into unmistakably Kantian territory instead.

Keywords: Rohmer, *Stromboli*, Sartre, Kant

3.1. The Other

Before dealing with Rohmer's 'conversion', it is necessary to return briefly to *Being and Nothingness* and, more specifically, to Sartre's discussion of the Other.

As for-itself consciousness emerges by means of self-reflection, it immediately enters a set of (at least potential) relationships with other for-itself consciousnesses. As we have seen, self-consciousness cannot directly access itself *but* as a temporalizing agency; such a temporalization, though, can only take place on an intersubjective ground. That is to say, the project characterizing for-itself consciousness cannot but be one that involves outward action. If, on the one hand, for-itself consciousness cannot self-reflexively access itself directly, on the other hand it can only acknowledge itself as *out there*, the prey of an essentially intersubjective game involving other

likewise consciousnesses. In other words, Being-for-itself is automatically also being-for-others.

If, on the one hand, for-itself consciousness is, as it were, split into a reflecting and a reflected consciousness, on the other hand a similar kind of split is enacted between the for-itself consciousness and (an)other for-itself consciousness(es) (potentially) looking at it. It can even be said that when a for-itself consciousness reflects upon itself, it does so as if it were itself the object of *another* gaze, another for-itself consciousness looking at it. In this respect, the Other is the one who can see me the way I cannot, that is, from the outside. The Other is 'the radical negation of my experience, since he is the one for whom I am not subject but object. Therefore as the subject of knowledge I strive to determine as object the subject who denies my character as subject and who himself determines me as object.'[1]

What is at stake is no less than freedom itself. As we have seen, freedom comes into play as soon as a for-itself consciousness emerges. Being-for-others is the negative limit and, at the same time, the positive condition of a consciousness's freedom: by looking at me, the Other objectifies me (hence my *shame*, i.e. 'the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging'[2]) and nihilates my freedom for the sake of his own freedom,[3] but precisely by objectifying back this objectification I can regain control of myself-qua-for-the-others, which enables me to elaborate my project of freedom on that further basis. Twice in his volume, Sartre uses the effective metaphor of a game of musical chairs to suggest this 'battle' between a for-itself consciousness and its Other.

> What I refuse to be can be nothing but this refusal to be the Me by means of which the Other is making me an object. Or, if you prefer, I refuse my refused Me; I determine myself as Myself by means of the refusal of the Me-refused; I posit this refused Me as an alienated-Me in the same upsurge in which I wrench myself away from the Other. But I thereby recognize and affirm not only the Other but the existence of my Self-for-others. Indeed this is because I can not not-be the Other unless I assume my

1 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 228.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 261.

3 'Thus through the look I experience the Other concretely as a free, conscious subject who causes there to be a world by temporalizing himself toward his own possibilities. That subject's presence without intermediary is the necessary condition of all thought which I would attempt to form concerning myself. The Other is that "myself" from which nothing separates me, absolutely nothing except his pure and total freedom; that is, that indetermination of himself which he has to be for and through himself.' Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 271.

> being-as-object for the Other. The disappearance of the alienated Me would involve the disappearance of the Other through the collapse of Myself. I escape the Other by leaving him with my alienated Me in his hands. But as I choose myself as a tearing away from the Other, I assume and recognize as mine this alienated Me. My wrenching away from the Other-that is, my Self-is by its essential structure an assumption as mine of this Me which the Other refuses; we can even say that it is only that.[4]

Sartre famously referred to the example of the man looking through a keyhole and hearing the steps of another man approaching and potentially 'stealing' him his voyeuristic privacy,[5] in order to explain this 'game of musical chairs' between Self and Other. It is worth stressing that it is not simply a matter of returning the gaze, because the eye and the gaze are, for Sartre, as distinguished as perception and imagination are.[6] To apprehend the gaze of the Other does not necessarily mean to look back at him: it means to be *conscious* of being looked at.[7] I can perceive an eye, but not the gaze of the Other: if I perceive his eyes on me, then I miss the gaze, and if I am conscious of his gaze, I just don't see them. Of course, most of the time the gaze of the Other can come with 'a pair of eyes,' but 'the look will be given just as well on occasion when there is a rustling of branches, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter, or a light movement of a curtain.'[8] It is not a matter of actually being seen by someone, but 'the permanent possibility that a subject who sees me may be substituted for the object seen by me,'[9] that is, the permanent possibility that a subject might be reversed into an object and the other way around – both neatly distinguished from each other. For all the occasional overlapping between the eye and the gaze, they are neither reciprocal, nor coincident.

Precisely because the eye is not the gaze, the Other is not necessarily embodied in a person or in a group of persons; it is, more fundamentally, a system of representations that does not belong to me but that includes me, and hence concerns me and compels me to face it somehow, even when I am dealing with nobody but myself. It is, in a sense, myself qua external and liable to be seen.

4 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 285.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 259ff.
6 Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 288.
7 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 258.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 257.
9 *Ibid.*

> I aim at the Other in so far as he is a connected system of experiences out of reach in which I figure as one object among others. But to the extent that I strive to determine the concrete nature of this system of representations and the place which I occupy there as an object, I radically transcend the field of my experience. I am concerned with a series of phenomena which on principle can never be accessible to my intuition, and consequently I exceed the lawful limits of my knowledge. I seek to bind together experiences which will never be my experiences, and consequently this work of construction and unification can in no way serve for the unification of my own experience.[10]

All of which is just another way of saying what has already been said: it is through imagination (that is, nihilation), *as opposed to perception*, that I both project my freedom into the future and I apprehend the objectifying gaze of the Other (that is, of myself qua object, qua virtually seen by a subject, from the outside) which I objectify (that is, nihilate) in turn to regain and re-elaborate my freedom.

3.2. The triumph of exteriority over interiority

In September 1950,[11] Rohmer attended a preview of Roberto Rossellini's *Stromboli*. During the screening, something clicked in his mind.

> If you want to retrace my aesthetic and ideological itinerary, you'd have to start with the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, which made its mark on me in the beginning. I never talk about Sartre, but he was still my starting point. The articles that appeared in *Situations I*, which discovered Faulkner, Dos Passos, and even Husserl, contributed a great deal to my thinking. I went through an existentialist period before I began thinking about film, but the influence remained, I think, and continued to affect me in my first films. Rossellini is the one who turned me away from existentialism. It happened in the middle of *Stromboli*. During the first few minutes of the screening, I felt the limits of this Sartrean realism, to which I thought the film was going to be confined. I hated the way it invited me to look beyond that. Right then and there, I converted. That's what's so great about *Stromboli*. It was my road to Damascus: In the middle of the film, I converted, and I changed my perspective.[12]

10 *Ibid.*, p. 228.
11 De Baecque and Herpe, *Eric Rohmer*, p. 55.
12 Rohmer, 'The Critical Years: Interview with Eric Rohmer by Jean Narboni', pp. 1-18.

What is so special about *Stromboli*? What is the 'Sartrean realism' the film apparently espoused?

Stromboli is, firstly, the name of the Italian island that the heroine of the film, Karen, moves to having married a local fisherman. Love is only partially (if at all) involved in their marriage: the main reason behind her decision is probably the opportunity to leave the refugee camp she had been confined to, right after the war. Soon, life on the island proves harsh, especially for a stranger unused to local habits – and not only because its volcano periodically threatens to erupt. The inhabitants are somewhat narrow-minded and, in their view, a woman is not entitled to any independence. Her husband behaves accordingly, and locks her inside their house as soon as she tells him that she wants to leave the island. She manages to escape though, and tries to reach the other shore of the island, where a boat would take her to the mainland. But she must pass the volcano and, as she approaches the crater, the spewing smoke and fumes make her (she is three months pregnant) pass out. When she wakes up, she suddenly seems reconciled with the island, its nature and its inhabitants. She cries out 'My God! Oh merciful God!' But then the film ends, without resolving which side of the volcano she chooses, the one with the boat or the one with her husband.

Stromboli quite literally enacts an existentialist quest for freedom. The villagers (including her own husband) are, evidently, Karen's Other – all the more so as they constantly gaze and spy upon her in order to keep her under strict control. She has no privacy; her existence is constantly 'for-the-others', under the others' scrutiny, even when they're not physically there – but most graphically, of course, when they are silently staring at her. This occurs in a number of scenes: when a group of women disapprovingly inspect her house from the outside in, through the door; when some older men perform a serenade in front of the window of the woman Karen was visiting that evening, when she is found flirting with the lighthouse keeper on the shore under the eyes of the scandalized villagers. It is not incorrect to use the very Sartrean word 'situation' to designate the oppressive prison Karen feels confined inside, as many commentators have highlighted the vividly *spatial* character of her confinement: not only the island itself, but also, for example, the intricate maze of the village roads, or the tiny little rooms of those fishermen's houses. Karen nervously moves and galumphs in these closed spaces, quickly developing the firm will to run away, i.e. to project her own freedom in the near future by nihilating that environment, and to free herself from the omnipresent gaze of the Other.

However, precisely when Karen is all alone on the volcano, finally freed from the pressures of the villagers (her Other), her 'fundamental project' fails

for good. We shall delve into the film's ending later on; for the time being, it is important to highlight the fact that, even before this final failure, Karen is faced with clear signals that her hopes for freedom are utterly in vain. In one scene, Karen stares at a little rabbit being strangled by a ferret, and she cries out in horror. In another very gruesome, very long (much longer than any kind of dramaturgical balance would ever allow) scene, Karen decides, out of mere curiosity, to attend the tuna fishing engaging her husband and all the men in the village: this experience leaves her emotionally devastated, because of the sheer, relentless brutality of the process.

> And just as he makes things act, Rossellini considers his characters to be 'things' as well. Rossellini's art is one of the least apt to express interior life. The whimpering, the gasping, and the rattling with which Ingrid Bergman fills the walls and shores signify nothing more than the leaps of a small rabbit strangled by the carnivorous stone marten or of a tuna pierced by the fisherman's pike. They *are* her and, stripped of all mystery reveal only her interior emptiness.[13]

It is the triumph of exteriority against any interiority: Karen is nothing but the whimpering, the gasping and the rattling she lets out. Such gestures express nothing of her inner life: they only manifest a totally outward relation, namely the fact that she is as devoid of interiority as a rabbit or a tuna. Interiority, including the interiority still implied in the 'for-itself consciousness' qua self-reflexive consciousness (that is, Karen's 'fundamental project' of freedom), is not only a mere illusion engendered by an intersubjective play between completely external elements, but even completely absent. With the Other being everywhere and nowhere (Rossellini 'makes things act': *everything* is subjectified, hence nothing is), the subject is a mere object among other objects (his characters are things): here Rohmer indeed seems to step beyond Sartre's 'game of musical chairs' between the Self and the Other, resting upon the infinite reversal between subject and object.

3.3. Pulling phenomenology back to its Kantian roots

We are already beginning to see that *Stromboli* enabled Rohmer to formalize the detachment from the Sartrean conception of self-consciousness he had somehow been willing to depart from since 'Cinema, an Art of Space'.

13 Rohmer, 'Roberto Rossellini: *Stromboli*', p. 127.

Above all, it enabled him to find the appropriate theoretical framework for this refusal, namely *Kantian philosophy*, which he now more overtly embraces. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre repeatedly affirms that for-itself consciousness is a self-reflection of a strictly non-Kantian kind; more generally, Sartre tried to *rethink* Kant's transcendental turn with the help of phenomenology, while Rohmer, after his conversion, headed 'back to the original,' repudiating Sartre's own detachment. Indeed, for Sartre, the Kantians 'preoccupied with establishing the universal laws of subjectivity which are the same for all, never dealt with the question of *persons*. The subject is only the common essence of these persons.'[14] Rohmer, vis-à-vis Rossellini's attempt to strip Karen of any humanity and individuality, found himself wanting to dispose of 'persons' and to get back to this 'common essence'; that is, to a duly emptied-out *subject* whose universality ensued from its very emptiness.

'Where Sartre departs radically from Kant is in his account of self-consciousness. For Sartre, the self-consciousness that accompanies every act of consciousness makes reference to an ideal self which both specifies some way in which one's life would have intrinsic value and indicates the inadequacies of one's present life, thereby "nihilating" it.'[15] Likewise, Karen 'nihilates' her life in the village and deems it inadequate, thinking that her life has an intrinsic value. As shown in Chapter one, in *The Transcendence of the Ego* and in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre corrects, as it were, Cartesian cogito without ever getting rid of it. As a result of the way he articulates together positional and non-positional, in-itself and for-itself consciousnesses, he always maintains the possibility for consciousness to be reflected upon itself; while he holds that consciousness cannot be positively accessible to itself and fully self-transparent, he admits that consciousness is *negatively* accessible to itself thanks to nihilation (which is, in an unmistakably Heideggerian vein, essentially a temporalization). What he does *not* admit is a kind of consciousness intended as a purely logical function accompanying all representations but that cannot, in any way, be accessed by itself: Kant's transcendental ego.[16] Kant's transcendental gesture consisted primarily of emptying out

14 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 225.

15 Baldwin, 'The Original Choice in Sartre and Kant', p. 33.

16 'The "percipi" referred us to a percipiens, the being of which has been revealed to us as consciousness. Thus we have attained the ontological foundation of knowledge, the first being to whom all other appearances appear, the absolute in relation to which every phenomenon is relative. This is no longer the subject in Kant's meaning of the term, but it is subjectivity itself, the immanence of self in self. Henceforth we have escaped idealism.' Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. lvii.

the subject of self-consciousness; he firmly distinguished the 'I think' (the purely formal unity of apperception/consciousness/experience, accompanying every representations of objects, as that which ensures their internal unity and consistency) from 'the thing which thinks' (the identity of the thinking substance, the 'person' that actually 'does the thinking'). The two are reciprocally inaccessible: the 'thing which thinks' cannot be one of the objects of the 'I think': 'This subject is cognized only through the thoughts that are its predicates, and apart from them we can never have the least concept of it.'[17] In contrast with Sartre's consciousness, whose internal self-accessibility is negatively enabled by nihilation, Kant's is positively accessible *only qua external*. The 'I think' manages to provide a formal unity and coherence to the 'thing which thinks', thereby making it appear, precisely only when it is applied to *something else* outside of it.[18] In Rohmer's own words, *Stromboli* shows no inner experience whatsoever on Karen's part: the only accurate keys to her interiority are *external*, viz. the rabbit and the tuna. As we have seen, for Heidegger, imagination is time qua self-affection; accordingly, for Sartre, the self is only negatively accessible to itself, viz. it is accessible to itself only as temporalization, because self-affection is nothing but time. For Astruc and Rohmer, cinema, qua externalization of (Heidegger's view of) Kant's imagination, comes full circle by pushing to its extreme the preponderance of imagination Heidegger himself had theorized, and returns to Kant: it posits the only possible resolution of self-affection (which imagination is) on the outside. Human imagination, articulating the human time of *Dasein*, finds itself on the outside in the externalized imagination of cinema, articulating a mechanical, non-human time. Time qua self-affection is only possible in space, as per Kant;[19] thereby, imagination rejoins perception.

For Kant, the overall coherence that makes knowledge possible 'is an implication of the concept of the knower who is identical with himself.'[20]

17 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A346. 'Now it is, indeed, very evident that what I must presuppose in order to cognize an object at all cannot itself be cognized as an object by me, and that the determining self (the thinking) is distinct from the determinable self (the thinking subject) as cognition is distinct from the object [cognized]. Nonetheless, nothing is more natural and tempting than the illusion of regarding the unity in the synthesis of thoughts as a perceived unity in the subject of these thoughts. One might call this illusion the subreption of the hypostatized self-consciousness (*apperceptionis substantiatae*)', A402.

18 Slavoj Žižek often insists on this point, for instance in his 'The Cartesian Subject without the Cartesian Theatre', pp. 33-36.

19 See especially § 24 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, explicitly dealing with the relationship between the possibility to represent time and the possibility of self-reflection.

20 Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, p. 39.

This is why, in his account of the philosopher, Dieter Henrich insists that the analysis of self-consciousness is the most fundamental basis for Kant's entire system. In it, 'Kant starts from the Cartesian basis of all possible insight: it must be possible to know that any knowledge or experience I have is mine.'[21] Hence, in this sense, self-consciousness is always there, whatever we think or experience. Then, Henrich goes on listing the three basic features of the self, implied in Kant's conception of self-consciousness, and which clearly depart from Descartes': its unity (the self 'is the same in all thoughts and is not defined in terms of the thoughts it has, which means that it is the unitarian subject of all the thoughts'[22]), its activity,[23] its emptiness. As for the third aspect,

> There is no particular thought that is already a thought analytically whenever I think that I think, except the thought of the thinking subject itself. When I think the thought 'I think', my thought implies nothing analytically but this 'I think'. In other words, the meaning of 'I think' does not imply any thought other than the thought of the 'I' as the subject of possible thoughts. For this reason, accordingly, there is no particular thought that is part of the definition of the thinker. Nevertheless, a relationship to a particular thought that is different from the thought 'I' is essential for this reflective thought itself. Although no particular thought is analytically implied in the thought of the thinker, it is analytically implied that there is always another thought when I am thinking 'I think'. It is always permissible for us to ask: 'What do you think?' It does not make sense to allow the question 'Do you think or not?' while at the same time disallowing the question 'What are you thinking?' There is always an 'internal accusative' in the 'I think', but its content is not an analytical implication of the meaning of the 'I think'. What I am thinking is something different from the structure 'I think' and is contingent in

21 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

22 Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, p. 40.

23 'In order to think "I am thinking", I have to perform a certain operation that nowadays we call reflection, and this is the definition of an active relationship between the thinking subject and the particular thought in which the self thinks of itself as subject. Now, because the thought "I think" can potentially accompany every possible thought (that is the other evidence—it is always possible to think "I am thinking X"), the self has to have all thoughts in such a way that the active relationship of having them as mine can be built into their "being had" in general. The "being had" of a thought must be of such a kind that it can be built into its being had by me as mine. This feature, in turn, makes it at least plausible that this is true not only in the case of reflection—when the subject actively thinks about thinking a thought—but also in all thinking generally. The self fundamentally has the character of activity: it is an act.'*Ibid.*

> relation to it. There is no determinate thought that is analytically implied in the thought 'I think'.
> This conclusion is also implied by the consideration of what it means to assert that we are always able to know that a given thought is our thought. The thought 'I think' is necessarily the outcome of reflection. We have to have some particular thought first in order to be able to reflect on ourselves as thinking. One can always add to any thought the additional thought that it is my thought, but there can be no thought of this being mine without a particular thought that is not the thought of me as thinker. This means that the self is empty, in the sense that it has no thought of mere thought; and it is also empty in the further sense that it is necessarily related to something, it is not independent. There must be a thought of X in order to have the thought 'I', but X is not an implication of 'I'. Translated into Kant's epistemological language, this amounts to saying that nothing can be given in the cognizing subject, because if something were given in the subject, it would be analytically part of the thought 'I'. It has to be given to the subject, and that is entirely different. In some sense, the concept of 'given in the subject' is contradictory in meaning, but it can help to clarify the meaning of the concept 'given to the subject'. There must be something given to the subject; there is no subject unless something is given.[24]

For Kant, the fact that 'no self is possible unless it exists in such a way that there is an original relationship between it and something that is not itself but can be given to it'[25] is precisely what Henrich calls 'the common root of the two trunks'[26] upon whose distinction Kant's system ultimately rests: sensibility and understanding. In the same page, Henrich adds that Heidegger was well aware of a common root uniting sensibility and understanding in Kant's system, but chose to neglect its inaccessibility (that is, the inaccessibility of the self in itself through self-reflection) and tried to positively outline that original connection in his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*: thereby, he replaced the empty unity of the self with *Dasein*, with imagination qua temporalizing being-in-the-world.

Sartre too chose to neglect this inaccessibility: in this respect, he remained too Cartesian.

24 Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, p. 41.
25 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
26 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

> If, impossibly, you were to 'enter' a consciousness, you would be picked up by a whirlwind and thrown back outside to where the tree is and all the dust, for consciousness has no 'inside'. It is merely the exterior of itself and it is absolute flight, this refusal to be substance, that constitute it as a consciousness. Imagine now a linked series of bursts that wrests us from ourselves, that do not even leave an 'ourself' the time to form behind them, but rather hurl us out beyond them into the dry dust of the world, on to the rough earth, among things. Imagine we are thrown out in this way, abandoned by our very natures in an indifferent, hostile, resistant world. If you do so, you will have grasped the profound meaning of the discovery Husserl expresses in this famous phrase: 'All consciousness is consciousness *of* something'. [...] The philosophy of transcendence throws us out on to the high road, amid threats and under a blinding light. Being, says Heidegger, is being-in-the-world. This 'being-in' is to be understood in the sense of movement. To be is to be burst forth into the world. It is to start out from a nothingness-of-world-and-consciousness and suddenly to burst-out-as-consciousness-in-the-world. If consciousness attempts to regain control of itself, to coincide, at long last, with itself, in a nice warm room with the shutters closed, it annihilates itself.[27]

Clearly, Sartre's path to Husserlian phenomenology involves trading in Kant's *emptiness* of the self for Heidegger's *nothingness*. For all of Sartre's insistence that the latter is not a substance, and that it sanctions the triumph of exteriority over interiority just as much as the former does, it is hard to avoid the suspicion that in fact a remnant of some substantialized self remains, if only in the form of a mere agent of temporalization (as per Heidegger). For-itself consciousness is precisely this temporalizing nothingness, that only exists in the world rather than in itself.

Rohmer, for one, seems to have thought (particularly in the wake of *Stromboli*) that cinema is indeed close to Husserlian phenomenology, in that it 'hurls us out beyond a series of bursts into the dry dust of the world' and abandons us 'in an indifferent, hostile, resistant world,' like the Sicilian island Karen is trapped on. On the other hand, he also seems to have thought that, in order to do so, cinema should not pull Husserl forward toward

27 Sartre, 'Husserl's Phenomenology', pp. 43-44. This quotation lends itself particularly well to be juxtaposed to another one, on the status of consciousness in Faulkner's novels: 'Faulkner also elects to present his heroes from the outside, when their consciousness is complete, and then to show us, suddenly, the depths of their souls – when there is no longer anything there. Thus he gives the illusion that everything which impels them to act lies somewhere below the level of clear consciousness'. Sartre, 'American Novelists in French Eyes', p. 117.

Heidegger (and Sartre), but back towards Kant. He went so far as to affirm, later in his life, that, ultimately, Husserl never really added anything to Kant's revolution, which was the only true revolution in philosophy.[28] By siding with Kant and against Sartre, Rohmer opted for the radical impossibility (non-transparency) of consciousness's self-reflection, hence for the refusal of any 'interiority' to be acknowledged to consciousness. Regardless of the critic's actual faithfulness (or lack of it) to Kantian philosophy (which is beside the point), what should be stressed here is that Rohmer (implicitly) *referred to* Kant to endorse an utterly de-psychologized conception of self-consciousness, one in which self-consciousness is *nowhere but* in the purely formal 'I think' accompanying every apperception. Cinema, according to Rohmer, stands for *this* kind of self-consciousness: in cinema, there is no place for a novelistic, contingent, temporalizing, language-biased for-itself consciousness, because self-consciousness can be nowhere but in external perception.

28 Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, pp. 76-79. In 'Of Taste and Colours', Rohmer described a striking shot from a Hitchcock film showing a cigarette in an egg yolk: what made the egg look 'real' was precisely the slightly *unreal* vividness of its yellow. 'There is a kind of intensity belonging to the raw image that we must respect. Photography's ability to show objects spontaneously is something very precious, and we should play on it. One emulsion may be more sensitive to the yellow of a flower than to that of a rug, and vice versa. It may establish a difference between the two colors that the naked eye could not appreciate, but that the eye will find later. Film, just like museums, teaches us to see' (p. 70). The screen makes us aware of the *filters* whereby things look real to us. By acknowledging the limits of knowledge one is able to overcome them and to better approach reality. This point cannot but recall Edmund Husserl's concept of *epoché* ('suspension'), viz. the 'bracketing' of one's judgements about reality, in relation to reality. It should also be stressed that in 'Of Taste and Colours', film is not expected to adhere to empirical reality: on the contrary, it 'teaches us to see' only because it *distorts* and is *unfaithful* to empirical reality (i.e., it is more sensitive to the chromatic properties of some objects and less sensitive to those of others). For this reason, I do not think that Malcolm Turvey's critique (*Doubting Vision*, pp. 73-74) of the 'revelationist' paradigm of another neo-Kantian film theorist (Siegfried Kracauer) applies to Rohmer. Despite all his emphasis on cinema's capability to reveal the essence of beings through appearance, Rohmer cannot be called a 'revelationist' film theorist at all. As per Turvey's definition, 'revelationist' film theorists regard cinema as capable to 'uncover features of reality invisible to human vision' (p. 3). Rohmer does not share this mistrust towards human sight, and does not think that the movie camera is capable to see things that human eyes cannot see – a 'privilege' he rather seems to accord to television cameras instead; see for instance his 'The Photogenics of Sports: The Olympics in Rome'. He just seems to imply that the way the camera approaches empirical reality can significantly match our ordinary vision of things – which certainly entails that there can be a fertile exchange between the two perspectives (as in the example above), but not that one of them is necessarily better placed vis-à-vis empirical reality than the other.

3.4. Ethics

More importantly, by choosing Kant, Rohmer chose a philosophical framework establishing a strong connection between the involvement of self-consciousness in perception and ethics. Pure reason's impossibility of direct self-reflection is 'redeemed' by a different, and ultimately possible kind of self-reflection: the *practical* use of reason, whereby the subject imposes morality upon itself. So, before going further, it is necessary to briefly recall the basic tenets of Kant's moral philosophy – especially because in the final sequence of *Stromboli* Karen, quite literally, embraces Kant's moral law.

Kantian ethics notoriously revolves around freedom. 'Freedom', in Kantian terms, means to be freed from the constraints of causality, to be released from the tight interconnection of causes and effects. Nature (the totality of appearances) is entirely regulated by causality. So is man, who experiences the world only as a set of phenomena (appearances), themselves organized in terms of cause-effect relationships. However, man is essentially twofold: on the one hand, man must be regarded as phenomenal; on the other hand, man is noumenal. It is a thing 'in itself' and not just an appearance. This means that, on the one hand, man is submitted to the constraints of mechanical determinism (i.e. man is ruled by cause-effect relationships), but, on the other hand, man is free from them. This led Kant to postulate the existence of 'special' causes lying outside of the phenomenal network of causes and effects: the immortal soul and God. They are the source of the noumenal, non-causal side of man. Human beings are thus not only subjected to their sensible character, according to which they are absorbed in a virtually infinite network of causes and effects; from the side of their intelligible character (qua ensured by the immortal soul and God), they determine themselves through freedom, they are their own cause and thus break with the supremacy of the cause-effect texture by choosing to act regardless of cause-effect relationships.[29] This is possible thanks to *reason* in its *practical* use, enabling human beings to be 'both legislators of and subject to the laws they obey,'[30] irrespective of their own 'pathological interests' (one's personal inclinations). For the German philosopher, there would be no free will, no moral autonomy at all, without the *universal* reason making them possible. Reason allows us to formulate *maxims*, the subjective principles of action one freely imposes on oneself. 'Freedom' can only lie in the self-imposition of maxims on oneself. Maxims can only emerge in compliance with the

29 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A538-542.
30 Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, p. 70.

purely formal principle known as *moral law*. Thanks to our reason, we use that formal principle to formulate maxims. If a maxim does not comply with that formal principle, it is simply not valid.

This is the most succinct formulation of the moral law: 'So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle of a universal legislation.'[31] Reason enables us to formulate ethically valid maxims (which we then choose to impose on ourselves to regulate our will and deeds), that is, maxims suiting not only us but, potentially, anybody else. In other words, moral law lets us play on both sides: the maxim lies in its patent, universally valid formulation without ceasing to be 'pathologically' my own; this duplicity (articulating a purely formal principle and its more 'substantial' source) is clearly rooted in the other Kantian split, that between a purely formal 'I think' and the 'thing which thinks'.

Without this formal 'stepping out' of oneself in order to self-impose law on oneself by embracing a universal reason, which is, nonetheless, in oneself in the first place (which Kant calls 'respect' throughout the third chapter – 'On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason' – of his *Critique of Practical Reason*), 'the picture coming into focus looks more like a melancholy Dane ready to "leap" or an anguished, near-sighted Frenchman "condemned to be free" than the dutiful sage of Königsberg.'[32] The real match is not, as for Sartre, between an individual (a for-itself consciousness) and the situation it stems from, but between an individual and reason, whereby self-legislation (the practical use of reason) is possible, and which is universal: it belongs to that individual as well as to anybody else.

In *Stromboli*, the maxim comes at the very end of the film. It is thus worth describing the final sequence in more detail. Three phases can be distinguished:

1. Karen walks on the volcano slope. In stark contrast with the rest of the film (where she had been constantly under somebody's gaze), nobody is watching her, but the camera. Its presence can be distinctly 'felt' because of the great variety of angles it chooses in order to quite lengthily shoot the woman. Occasional shot-countershots show Karen watch the crater or other pieces of landscape.
2. As night falls, an exhausted Karen decides to stop and lie on her back. This time, a shot-countershot between Karen and the stars in the sky is accompanied by Karen's voice invoking God. Clearly then, God (who never manifests himself in any discernible way in the film) is, in this

31 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, § 7.
32 Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, p. 71.

case, nothing but *the embodiment of the previous absence of gazes*, an absence that was all the more flagrant because, in the rest of the film, Karen is constantly observed.

3. The next morning, she reconciles with nature all around ('What a mystery! What a beauty!') and expresses two perfectly contradictory intentions: running away or going back to the village. The film does not show us her decision. The only thing she seems to be sure about is that she will look after her baby, no matter what, with the help of God.

Her decision to look after the baby is clearly the maxim Karen chooses to adopt. The freedom she chooses is the Kantian one, as opposed to the Sartrean one, consisting of 'nihilating' from her environment to pursue a self-chosen project. The fact that the film ends with an abrupt narrative mutilation (it does not reveal which way Karen chooses, whether she is heading back to the village or to the ship taking her somewhere else) is a way of repudiating temporalization as such, and with it the idea of a project in the Sartrean sense.[33] Having encountered the clash between (her own) freedom and nature (the third antinomy in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) on the volcano, Karen finds God: she lies on her back, looks at the sky and realizes that she has, exactly as Kant put it, the 'starred sky above her' and the godly 'moral law within her.' Indeed, the next morning, she encounters the antinomy of practical reason (which Kant openly acknowledges as running parallel to the *Pure*'s third[34]): the one between 'the desire for happiness' as 'the motivating cause for maxims of virtue' (to run away from the island)

33 Six years later, in a review of Rossellini's *Angst* (1956), François Truffaut harks back to *Stromboli*'s indifference towards the imperatives of storytelling: 'Rossellini's films do not tell stories with images but paint characters who vary on contact with certain geographical, social, spiritual, or political realities. A plot, in the novelistic sense of the term, consisting of a classical dramatic construction, with a beginning, a centre and an ending, would bother the author of *Paisà* and shock his acute awareness of the reality of things and beings. Rossellini, when interrogated, cannot tell if at the end of *Stromboli*, Ingrid Bergman goes back down to the village, dies or runs away, and yet that is precisely what matters to the audience who leaves the theatre, unsatisfied'. Originally: 'Les films de Rossellini ne racontent pas des histoires en images mais peignent des caractères qui se modifient au contact de certaines réalités géographiques, sociales, spirituelles, ou politiques. Une intrigue au sens romanesque du mot comportant une construction dramatique classique, avec un début, un centre et un final heurte l'auteur de Paisa et choque son sens aigu de la réalité des êtres et des choses. Rossellini, lorsqu'on le questionne, ne peut dire si à la fin de *Stromboli*, Ingrid Bergman redescend au village, meurt ou s'enfuit, et cependant c'est tout ce qui importe au public qui quitte la salle, insatisfait.' Truffaut, 'La peur', p. 5. Interestingly, this passage interweaves a frustrated temporalization with an eminently spatial *mise en scène* (characters don't develop by means of narrative progression, but by getting in touch with a series of – geographical, social spiritual, political – environments).

34 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 145.

and 'the maxim of virtue' as 'the efficient cause of happiness'[35] (to go back to the village). The antinomy is solved by submitting to a self-legislated maxim that is also universally valid: by resolving to look after the baby no matter what, Karen effaces the very distinction between her 'selfish' longing for happiness and duty for duty's sake. The film ends abruptly, without showing the outcome of the adoption of the maxim, precisely because, in a Kantian vein, the solution lies in the adoption of the maxim itself, regardless of the outcome.

Moreover, 'God', here, is clearly only a postulated one, like in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The actual, substantial presence of God cannot be discerned in any way in the film, not even indirectly, not even in this final sequence. When the heroine 'sees' God (by looking at the starry sky), the latter is only the embodiment of the absence of gazes hitherto experienced on the slope of the volcano. Put differently, by showing Karen's deep unease on the volcano, the film hints at the fact that man is both at odds with, but fully enveloped by nature (accordingly, the camera variously shows Karen as part of nature, and as subjectively gazing at it through the camera). Man perceives nature, and himself within it, in a phenomenal way; that is, qua submitted to mechanical laws – but, Karen's bewilderment shows that man is also *not* part of nature, that there is a noumenal part that cannot be shown, but remains to be accounted for. This fundamental imbalance between man and nature cannot be resolved within nature alone – hence the need for morality to restore the balance. In this final sequence, God is *nothing but* the non-narrative (viz. causal only in a non-direct way) bridge between the scene showing Karen lost in nature and the one showing her reconciliation thanks to morality. Mirroring Kant, it is the empty postulation that *stabilizes* the man/nature imbalance shown in the previous scene, thereby preparing the way for the otherwise unprepared and outrageously sudden reconciliation thanks to morality in the next one.

In this regard, Rohmer wrote that 'He [God] pardons at the moment when man, turning himself into an administrator of justice, makes insensitivity a rule.'[36] In Kant, God is nothing but a by-product of man's self-legislation, a formal 'stepping out' of oneself in order to self-impose law on oneself by embracing a universal reason that is nonetheless in oneself in the first place. In *Stromboli*, God is the pretext whereby Karen looks upon herself from the outside. Thanks to a shot-countershot with nobody in particular, Karen takes upon herself the 'cumbersome' absence of gazes having characterized the

35 *Ibid.*
36 Rohmer, 'Roberto Rossellini: *Stromboli*', p. 124.

previous sequences; thereby, she gets a grip, 'makes insensitivity a rule' (in that she overcomes her hypersensitivity in the previous scene) and 'turns into an administrator of justice' (in that she prepares the 'moral turn' of the next scene) by acknowledging herself as pure externality (that is, as somebody who cannot escape the gaze of the Other, even when nobody is around). If ever there was an image that stood for Astruc's *caméra-stylo* qua unspoken impossibility of translating Descartes' *Discourse on Method* ('I think therefore I am') into cinema if not as a Kantian critique thereof (as was mentioned in Chapter two), it is this shot-countershot, enacting Karen's self-reflection in purely external terms, and by way of 'a Kantian' God overcoming the deadlock of impossible self-reflection by shifting its ground to ethics.

Moreover, Rohmer's quotation (God pardoning 'at the moment when man, turning himself into an administrator of justice, makes insensitivity a rule') is not the only nod to Kantian morality in his text: most notably, 'respect' (which was mentioned in passing a few paragraphs ago) is overtly alluded to: cinema, 'in the process of one of its more questionable procedures, "realism", suddenly begins, as if in spite of itself, to rediscover the meaning of the virtue of *respect*, which was formerly the symbol of art.'[37]

Kant's notorious description of the *sublime* addresses the very same issue. The contemplation of various manifestations of the might of nature (including 'volcanoes in all their violence of destruction'[38]) from a safe position not only reminds us of how little and powerless we are in comparison, but also suggests us that there is something even mightier than that: our own moral law. 'What we encounter here is the basic paradox of the Kantian autonomy: I am a free and autonomous subject, delivered from the constraints of my pathological nature, precisely and only insofar as my feeling of self-esteem is crushed down by the humiliating pressure of the moral Law.'[39] This is precisely what Karen undergoes while ascending the volcano, overpowered by both nature and the moral law splitting her in two. Rohmer's article not only affirms that 'perhaps of all the arts, film is the only one today that [...] still leaves room for the aesthetic category of the *sublime*, elsewhere discarded because of an excusable sense of modesty,'[40] but also insists on the heroine's humiliation (the fundamental purpose of the whole sublime experience) almost to the point of morbidity:

37 *Ibid.*, p. 127.
38 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, B. § 28, 261.
39 Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, p. 47.
40 Rohmer, 'Roberto Rossellini: *Stromboli*', pp. 124-126.

> Like a trapped animal, the heroine spares us none of her lamentable struggles. We contemplate her with disgust, never sympathy. This weak creature seemed just the type to touch us. Yet, the most disinterested movements, the feelings of disgust and the delicacies of the fragile, protected woman, are nothing here but the mark of a sordid appetite for comfortable life and only persuade us all the more of her fundamental abjection.[41]

3.5. God?

Morbidity aside, the point of the above passage (and of a number of others in Rohmer's review) is that *Stromboli* represents *the triumph of exteriority over interiority*. Whereas 'Cinema, an Art of Space' still conceded that the body had some centrality in the exploration of space (as shown in the Keaton and Murnau examples), in 'Roberto Rossellini: *Stromboli*' the victory of space over the body is *total*: 'The set will automatically form the actors' movements: the room with thick walls, the narrow courtyard, the steep or sheer slopes. They tell us of an obsession with a closed world, a world that confines into an always narrower matrix the large graceful body of the imprudent woman who wanted to remake it to her liking.'[42] Man is nothing but the prey of space. In this respect, it is not surprising that on the front page of the very same issue of *La Gazette du cinéma* (more on this later) in which *Stromboli*'s review first appeared (November 1950), one could read under the banner headline 'Fonction du regard' a few paragraphs taken from Paul Valéry's diaries, ending with the equation 'L'espace = être autre que soi' ('space = to be somebody other than who one is').

The crucial paradox is that the most open space shown by the film is also the most constricted, i.e. the one in which Karen feels most confined and trapped: the slope of the volcano. Thus, the final victory of outwardness is ultimately due to the fact that, in the end, *the inside and the outside switch places*. There, in the open air next to the crater, Karen feels imprisoned because she is constantly observed, with no Other in sight. The eye of the movie camera constantly stares at her, and scrupulously follows her everywhere.

This directorial choice seems quite deliberate. In his biography of the Italian director, Tag Gallagher reported a declaration Rossellini allegedly made to a writer friend, Raoul Maria de Angelis:

41 *Ibid.*, p. 124.
42 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

> I'd use the camera to follow a character obsessively: contemporary anguish derives precisely from this inability to escape the lens' implacable eye. [...] [I]n letting the character go wherever he wants, there's a risk of seeing him disappear around the first corner[.] [...] He has to be followed, his movements and lines have to be controlled, he has to be reduced to impotency; otherwise we run into trouble. The camera inserts itself between the character's destiny and the plot's necessity, determining a new fatalness.[43]

These words are from early 1944, but already perfectly describe what Karen is to undergo in *Stromboli* some years later. The new fatalness is: 'you can't escape the omnipresent camera eye.' That is to say: no matter how hard one tries to re-objectify the objectifying Other in the Sartrean Self-Other game of musical chairs, there is no respite from the gaze of this other non-Sartrean (because it cannot be subjectivized nor objectified) 'Other'. One is always looked at by a gaze that objectifies the subject, but that cannot be objectified in return, because it is not the gaze of some subject, not even an imaginary one. 'The Other's look confers spatiality upon me. To apprehend oneself as looked-at is to apprehend oneself as a spatializing-spatialized';[44] Karen apprehends herself as looked-at and hence as spatialized, *but not as spatializing* because there is no Other to return the gaze to, no Other that can be spatialized. Are we allowed to call this other 'Other' 'God'? Yes, but only in the Kantian sense, i.e. as a postulation whose necessity originates from our inherent impossibility to make sense of nature in a straight, non-contradictory way. As we have seen a few paragraphs ago, Karen's suffering on the volcano illustrates precisely the fact that man is at odds with nature while being encompassed in it, and the eye constantly gazing upon her suggests that God is, as it were, 'already there', waiting for someone to acknowledge him (which Karen does, in the next scene), but virtually already there all the same, because the imbalance between man and nature 'calls for' an Other (of a non-Sartrean kind) to stabilize their relationship by making morality possible. This is Karen's 'character's destiny': she finds salvation only when she accepts being constantly looked at, i.e. when she acknowledges God, which can be regarded here as Kant's moral law, splitting the subject by determining who the subject is. The baby she carries is the maxim she chooses ('with the help of God,' as she herself puts it). After her failure to ground her freedom, in a Sartrean vein, on a groundless choice

43 Gallagher, *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini*, p. 108.
44 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 262.

by her own consciousness, and on a Sartrean game of musical chairs with the Sartrean Other (the villagers), Karen realizes that freedom can only be attained by submitting to the one and only Other – God qua guarantor of Kantian moral law. As per Rossellini's quotation, the camera embodies not only Karen's destiny of always being looked at, but also plot's necessity: here, the camera work, making the viewer feel that Karen is constantly gazed at, literally replaces narrative continuity, because the only answer the customary question 'what happens next?' can get at this point of the storyline is 'nothing, but a woman walking and been constantly gazed by the camera eye.'

Rohmer enthusiastically commends Rossellini's ability to stick to none other than sheer appearances. Thereby, he escapes the deadlock of literature: that of having to choose a definite point of view supposed to stand for a specific, personal consciousness. In *Stromboli*, 'a kind of tragic horror fixes our gaze and imposes a view of the world that is neither that of man, in that it excludes compassion, nor that of God, in that it still inspires terror.'[45] Rossellini's camera is neither involved, nor detached. It is neither human, nor inhuman; neither with, nor without the heroine it constantly stares at. More to the point, we should read this passage alongside Rohmer's remark on Hawks as well as Godard's on *Man of the West*, reported towards the end of Chapter one. Therein, the critics implied that one of the possible virtues of cinema lied in eschewing the false alternative novels normally have to cope with, between the point of view of the characters and that of the impersonal narrator. In other words, cinema is not obliged to choose an individuated consciousness to stick to, and can do without it. This is what Rossellini does: he finds an answer to the question that obsessed Rohmer at the end of the Forties, namely 'how can cinema *not* be literary? How can it *show* instead of *telling*, in a non-literary way?' He finds a way to stick to appearance for appearance's sake, with no temporalizing, novelistic for-itself consciousness (hence without any literary gimmicks as well) filtering it. Sheer appearances unfold through 'their own' time, by a seemingly internal logic (if only the logic of mere succession), not through the contingent time of some definite consciousness organizing them (neither that of a character, nor that of some impersonal narrator).

> *Stromboli* is the story of a sinner who receives God's grace. Rossellini does not show the odyssey of a conversion, with the hesitation, remorse, hopes, and slow and continual victories over oneself. God's majesty shines here

45 Rohmer, 'Roberto Rossellini: *Stromboli*', p. 127.

> with such a hard and terrible brilliancy that no human conscience could bear even the dullest reflection of it. This grand Catholic film solemnly unravels its exterior pomp and shows nothing of interior life, except what we are left to imagine of the hideous motives of a soul sensitive to the call of the world.[46]

Here, God seems to be a synonym for a radical *emptying out of consciousness* (which, as we have seen, is tantamount to a return to Kant's transcendental turn 'against' Sartre's for-itself consciousness). *Stromboli* is one of those 'works that, without rhetoric, simply by the evidence of what we are shown, proclaim more loudly man's misery without God.'[47] It proclaims that individuated consciousnesses are nothing, while God *qua external appearance* is everything.

What are we to make of this strange notion of God 'qua external appearance'? As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, Sartre's 'game of musical chairs' between Self and Other strictly corresponds to for-itself consciousness's self-reflection, that is, to its split into a reflecting and a reflected consciousness. By replacing this 'game of musical chairs' (initially taking place in the village) with an encounter with God (on the volcano), *Stromboli* on the one hand *turns down* any possibility for for-itself consciousness's self-reflection, and on the other hand *enables* the ineradicable split between the purely formal 'I think' and the 'thing which thinks' to be 'redeemed' thanks to the self-imposition of the maxim by means of the purely formal moral law. The free self-imposition of the maxim thanks to practical reason is nothing but the flip side of the impossibility of cognitive self-reflection; God is precisely the merely postulated 'uncomfortable third' which, by adding itself to the two sides that are forever apart because of the impossibility of *cognitive* self-reflection, makes the *ethical* self-imposition of freedom (that is, of the maxim) possible. It is that which enables the distinction between moral self-imposition and self-reflection; it is that thanks to which moral self-imposition overcomes self-reflection and its inherent impossibility. Karen is not a subject bestowing duty to itself, but a subject bestowing duty to itself *through God* qua *nothing but the 'guardian' of the noumenal, the placeholder of the divine irreducibility of the transcendental ego*. It is such on both levels: the one in which self-consciousness is nowhere but in the purely formal 'I think' accompanying every apperception, as well as the one in which the impossibility of consciousness's self-reflection other

46 *Ibid.*, p. 124.
47 *Ibid.*

than in perception is redeemed by freedom, that is, by the self-imposition of the maxim. *Stromboli* shows 'God's majesty' inseparably in the morality it enables *and* in the self-sufficiency of whatever is perceived: Rohmer implies that 'the evidence of what we are shown' ('appearance for appearance's sake') attests to the fact that self-consciousness is nowhere but in perception itself, due to the formal 'I think' accompanying every perception, it being understood that, as we have seen some pages ago, God is the 'guarantor' of this very 'formalness' displaced at the ethical level.

Arguably, Rohmer saw in *Stromboli* the ultimate *anti-Huis Clos*. *Huis Clos* (*No Exit*) is the name of a 1944 theatrical play by Sartre about three dead people in hell. Hell, in his view, has nothing to do with flames and torture: it simply consists of a well-furnished room where the three characters are locked for eternity. None of them is able to cope with the respective individual guilt that entailed that punishment: accordingly, many commentators have rightly pointed out that all these characters represent the inherent impossibility of self-consciousness argued in *Being and Nothingness*. However, their guilt remains: each of them has been condemned to stay there forever because of his or her fundamental project, i.e. the self-grounded temporalizing free choice shaping one's life. Each of them is unable to take responsibility for one's own fundamental project (an incapability Sartre called 'bad faith'), and since he or she cannot master his or her respective fundamental project, the latter dominates him or her completely, in a puppet-like fashion. They all do have a (for-itself, temporalizing) consciousness, but they cannot access it through self-reflection: they can only reach it *through other people*. Hence, because each of them is unable to openly assume one's project, they end up repeating forever and ever the same game of musical chairs between self and other, reiterating over and over the same schemes of mutual interaction, so that their endless intersubjective play keeps endowing each of them with an identity of sorts. As we have seen, during most of *Stromboli* Karen too engages in a similar game of musical chairs with the villagers – but then she steps out of that imprisonment within the gazes of other people, by way of a somewhat paradoxical escape. Whereas the three characters in *Huis Clos* were at least animated by their own respective fundamental project (that is, by their own original freedom), Karen's fundamental project (to go away, to attain freedom) ultimately dies: on the slope of the volcano, Karen's consciousness is reduced to literally nothing, not even a temporalizing, free project. She is just a thing among other things, a piece of space in space. And whereas each character in *Huis Clos* was marked by an individual project (a free 'original sin') qua temporalizing consciousness that could not be accessed through

self-reflection but that could only come to the fore through each other's gaze, Karen turns an open-air absence of human gazes (which turned out to be *more* oppressive and claustrophobic than the room of *Huis Clos*, as the camera never left her alone) into an *absent* gaze (God's) enabling her to step out of herself and to face the total void of her own consciousness in order to *impose* freedom on it (as opposed to the characters in *Huis Clos*, condemned to act out the freedom they originally chose without coming to terms with their own original choice).

In accordance with this conception of God as standing for the 'emptying out' of the transcendental ego, it appears that Rohmer's review seems to *designate God as the ideal of the 'art of space' itself*. It is the ideal of total outwardness, of non-linguistic, immediate coincidence between appearance and any 'beyond', any 'meaning' that one would normally locate outside of it, enabled by the fact that the only self-consciousness that can ever be admitted is that which accompanies every apperception. Conversely, Sartre's 'for-itself consciousness' remains uncinematic, and wholly within *theatre*, viz. it can only correspond to characters expressing their 'fundamental project' through time and the short circuit of intersubjectivity, coherently contained within an enclosed theatrical scene wherein a ultimately regular dramaturgy unfolds.

> The poetic beauty of *Stromboli* borrows none of the pomp of the verb or the metaphor and thus does not fear an abuse of their power. The idea and the symbol are so indistinguishable that we no longer question the artifice of the person who united them for us. God's grandeur springs not from the mouths that speak of him but from the actual presence of the volcano, the lava, the waves, and the Italian shore.[48]

In this passage, so clearly contrasting 'expression' with 'manifestation' (ultimately making the latter coincident with God itself), the reference to *beauty* is crucial. *Being and Nothingness* conceives God as an impossibly accomplished coincidence between being-in-itself and being-for-itself; a total, unbroken, 'un-nihilated' immanence of being and consciousness.[49] Sartre cannot admit to such coincidence, so he cannot admit to any God. Much like God, beauty is for Sartre a kind of utopian reconciliation of the original separation (that is, the original transcendence and nihilation) between (for-itself) consciousness and Being.

48 Rohmer, 'Roberto Rossellini: *Stromboli*', p. 126.
49 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 90.

> This perpetually indicated but impossible fusion of essence and existence [...] is what we call *beauty*. Beauty therefore represents an ideal state of the world, correlative with an ideal realization of the for-itself; in this realization the essence and the existence of things are revealed as identity to a being who, in this very revelation, would be merged with himself in the absolute unity of the in-itself. This is precisely because the beautiful is not only a transcendent synthesis to be effected but because it can be realized only in and through a totalization of ourselves. This is precisely why we desire the beautiful and why we apprehend the universe as lacking the beautiful to the extent that we ourselves apprehend ourselves as a lack. But the beautiful is no more a potentiality of things than the in-itself-for-itself is a peculiar possibility of the for-itself. It haunts the world as an unrealizable. To the extent that man realizes the beautiful in the world, he realizes it in the imaginary mode. This means that in the aesthetic intuition, I apprehend an imaginary object across an imaginary realization of myself as a totality in-itself and for-itself. Ordinarily the beautiful, like value, is not thematically made explicit as a value-out-of-reach-of-the-world. It is implicitly apprehended on things as an absence; it is revealed implicitly across the *imperfection* of the world.[50]

This idea should be considered alongside Sartre's view of imagination, qua thoroughly distinguished from perception: beauty is *negatively* present in perceived reality, as an unrealizable possibility that imagination can nonetheless try to make real in the imaginary mode by nihilating from perceived reality. However, Rohmer's conviction that cinema reveals the actual possibility of beauty in and of the world refers to a properly Kantian beauty, which restores a substantial convergence between perception and imagination. How comes?

According to Kant, beauty comes from the *free play* of the faculties (imagination and understanding). While intuition, imagination, understanding, etc. are normally engaged in cognition (i.e. in attaching a definite concept to that which ensues from the synthesis of the manifold of appearances), in the aesthetic experience imagination and understanding are engaged in a free play, i.e. they process the data of perception in such a way that no definite concept can be attached (as for instance in the metaphor 'The sun arose, as out of virtue rises peace'). Thereby, a subjective *purposiveness without purpose* emerges (i.e. one that does not have the purpose of cognition): such is, in a nutshell, Kantian beauty. The beautiful object of aesthetic contemplation

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

presents itself so that its parts appears, to a certain subject, to have no other end but their own wholeness. This object is 'an end in itself' because the imagination synthesizes the manifold of appearances so that they do not coalesce into a steady concept (thereby qualifying as an object of cognition), but into something whose only purpose is, precisely, their holding together. To acknowledge beauty means to acknowledge the presence of the free play of one's faculties in an external, beautiful object.

Because of the role the imagination and understanding play in our ordinary perception, the possibility of their free play (that is, of beauty) is always at hand. Particularly in the case of cinema, where imagination and understanding are *physically disjointed*, and thus far less inclined to engage in cognition than they are in their free play. Cinema's mechanical imagination synthesizes the manifold of appearances so that they do not coalesce into a definite concept, because it does so, as it were, separate from understanding; the flow of appearances thereby produced is thus there not for cognition, but *just for appearance's sake*: it is an end in itself. The void opened up by the cinematic simulacrum of the transcendental synthesis of imagination by simulating cognition without cognizing anything, can only be filled by a different use of the understanding: a quintessentially aesthetic free play providing a unity (an internal coherence among the parts) that is not cognition-oriented, but engenders a 'purposiveness without purpose.' Cinema reproduces the transcendental process at the heart of cognition, but subtracts the cognitive purpose; thereby, the possibility to add *a different* (aesthetic) purposiveness (better still: to play with their necessarily being an end in itself, because they cannot have any other) comes into being. 'The beauty of a construction site or an empty lot comes from the angle through which we are forced to discover it. Yet the beauty is still that of an empty lot. The work is beautiful not because it demonstrates that one can create beauty with ugliness but because what we considered ugly is actually beautiful.'[51] An empty lot is not beautiful because our imagination can nihilate from it and realize in an imaginary mode the potential of beauty that lies in the parking lot without ever being liable to come true. Rather, the moment we perceive an empty lot, we activate faculties that can always (potentially) turn into a mode of free play, thereby making the object at issue an end in itself (beauty).

Ultimately, Rohmer wants to eschew the Sartrean/Heideggerian rift between consciousness and Being, according to which only *negativity* (nihilation, nothingness and the like) can mediate between the two. Rohmer

51 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 45.

returns to Kant precisely to affirm a *positive* link between them: if, on the one hand, Kant firmly separates thought from Being, on the other hand he acknowledges that *beauty* shows the possibility of a reconciliation between them. Beauty is, according to Rohmer's Kantism, the very proof that man's consciousness (which cinema replicates, by externalizing imagination) is in touch with Being/nature/world (he never really distinguished among them), because it finds its own purposiveness outside itself.[52]

> American literature today, whose influence on post-war Italian filmmakers we know, is one of the most brilliant illustrations of the Nietzschean myth of the 'death of God'. Each being, each event, is clad only in the charm of its pure existence. What is must be, in a world in which all hierarchy of religious or moral values is deliberately cast off. We can imagine the temptation of a philosophy that seems exactly suited to the filmmaker's purpose. Giving in to this temptation would mean failing to recognize that the portrayal of the small, true fact – 'realism' – is the requirement of an art whose very existence is paradoxical, but poetry, song, its end.[53]

The last sentence suggests precisely that cinematic appearances, being produced as if they were cognition-oriented (thanks to cinema's mechanical imagination, etc.), can only stop short of cognition ('an art whose very existence is paradoxical'), but can be used for appearance's sake ('but poetry, song, its end'). More generally, this passage tellingly intersects the possibility of God and the possibility of beauty ('poetry'), whereas the American literature that Sartre cherishes so much celebrates the death of God and the impossibility of beauty. That is to say, it sticks to sheer appearances, but only as a mere art of 'brute fact', never giving up a certain clash between it and the temporalizing, subjective for-itself consciousness that experiences it. It neglects beauty, and celebrates instead the radical rift between

52 Another way for consciousness to find human 'purposiveness without purpose' in the outer world is to spot geometric figures as part and parcel of cinematic beauty. This explains why Rohmer's film writing was affected by a certain geometrical bias, for instance when he spotted triangles in Anthony Mann's *mise en scène* ('Le roi des montagnes'), when he identified the curve as the privileged form in Frank Tashlin's films ('The Art of Caricature: Tashlin', p. 148), or when he qualified Renoir's cinema to be as perfect as a circle in that it refused to be squared off ('La carrosse d'or', p. 84) – not to mention that Claude Chabrol (who never concealed how deeply affected he had been by Rohmer's writings) wrote in his autobiography that in his view a film's *mise en scène* can (or should), in principle, be summarized by a virtually underlying geometric figure (Chabrol, *Et pourtant, je tourne...*, pp. 195-196).

53 Rohmer, 'Roberto Rossellini: *Stromboli*', p. 126.

consciousness and Being. Cinema, by contrast, bridges that rift by showing the actual possibility of beauty.

Much the same thing applies to *freedom*. For Sartre, 'the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God':[54] man's fundamental project is the inherently impossible attempt of the for-itself consciousness to regain an in-itself it has originally detached ('nihilated') from. It is freedom's impossible dream of being entirely self-founded, instead of being founded in the nihilation of something *else*. Crucially, as we have seen, Kant *does* admit to this possibility. For him, the possibility of God and the possibility of freedom are strictly interconnected: God is what has to be postulated so that human will can escape mechanical cause-effect determinism and posit itself as its own cause. In this way, the rift between consciousness and Being Sartre maintains is replaced by human will qua, according to Kant's perspective, the very bridge between phenomenon and noumenon.

Ultimately, in 'Roberto Rossellini: *Stromboli*', 'God' is primarily that which Kant postulated as the actual condition for beauty and freedom to exist. By insisting on God in this review, Rohmer basically wanted to affirm the possibility of beauty and freedom, and hence of a positive connection between consciousness and Being, as opposed to Heideggerian/Sartrean negativity. Importantly, the possibility for beauty and freedom on cinema screens rests, according to this perspective, upon the 'divorce' between the faculties (imagination and understanding) cinema enacts by externalizing imagination: the case of beauty has already been outlined a few paragraphs ago, while that of freedom will be clarified in the next chapters.

When the critic declared, in a 1983 interview, that 'there's no difference in his films [Howard Hawks's] between being and appearing. It's not being and nothingness, either. It's being opposed to being,'[55] he was actually summarizing a short note about the American director he wrote twenty years before,[56] in which he stated that Hawks was a director of being, because he was able to show not only nature, but also the action of man qua part of nature. But, then, why 'being opposed to being'? Because in the same note, Rohmer also made clear that man's alienation from (in his words, a 'non-communication' with) nature was not due to a lack of being, but to a *surplus* of being – which made Hawks's cinema absolutely optimistic and simultaneously absolutely pessimistic. 'Being opposed to being' thus referred

54 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 566.
55 Rohmer, 'The Critical Years', p. 10.
56 Rohmer, 'Red River'.

to the fact that, in Kantian terms, man is part and parcel of nature and, at the same time, free of its constraints. As Jan Völker put it, in his study of Kant's third *Critique* (*Ästhetik Der Lebendigkeit*), 'This is Kant's solution to the question of spirit. The spirit is the human faculty of negating the order of nature, and therein lies the paradoxical nature of the human being. It is its nature to negate nature.'[57] Or, as this beautifully Kantian formulation states: 'The monads which constitute his [Hawks's] world – from the plane to the thunderstorm, from the monkey to the scientist, from eternal Adam to eternal Eve – are not meant to give up their isolation, just as the leaf and the branch will never cease to be neighbours.'[58] Nature (the necessary proximity between the leaf and the branch) encompasses its own disruption (freedom, i.e. the 'monads' isolated from nature); in other words, 'being opposed to being'.

3.6. Echoes of the conversion

It is high time to draw some conclusions. As we have seen in the previous chapters, towards the end of the 1940s, Rohmer was led towards cinema by a typically literary agenda: that of asserting the superiority of showing over telling. Following Sartre, he thought that this aesthetic inclination had to be grounded in ontology – only to find that Sartre's ontology, as well as his ensuing literary theory, could only lead to an impasse, in that they regarded consciousness as a nothingness. On the other hand, they tended to reify and substantialize that nothingness (as it still remained a temporalizing agency). Because Sartre maintained that self-consciousness can be located both in the apperception of empirical reality and in a relatively and conditionally separate for-itself consciousness, the ensuing novelistic aesthetic commended novelistic styles and practices focussing on sheer empirical appearances, while never giving up the relevance of a temporalizing (for-itself) consciousness organizing and shaping them. Rohmer seems to imply that consciousness, the way this novelistic aesthetic saw it, *is not nothing enough*, whereas cinema has already demonstrated that it can do without that contingent, temporalizing, 'novelistic' for-itself consciousness

57 Quoted by Gertrude Koch in her 'Films as Experiment in Animation: Are Films Experiments on Human Beings?', p. 142.

58 Rohmer, 'Red River', p. 39. 'Les monades qui constituent son univers – de l'avion à l'orage, du singe au savant, de l'éternel Adam à l'Eve éternelle – n'ont pas plus à sortir de leur isolement que la feuille, sur la branche, à être sa voisine.'

(hence without any literary tricks and gimmicks). It is an 'art of space', i.e. an art in which the flow of time found itself immediately spatialized instead of being filtered by a temporalizing consciousness. Rohmer never demonstrated this assumption, which he basically regarded as self-evident, and which nonetheless clearly begged the question: 'how can cinema embody *no individuated consciousness*, a "nothing" of consciousness, without reifying, substantializing and personalizing that nothing the way the novel generally does?' What Rohmer lacked at that point was a suitable theoretical/philosophical framework capable of answering that question. It would be found only in 1950, with *Stromboli*, and it would be Kant. Not necessarily an orthodox view of Kant, but more likely one that Rohmer partly tailor-made for the sake of his no-longer-Sartrean aesthetics of cinema.

It is important to clarify that one should not look for cast-iron theoretical consistency in Rohmer's writings. Rohmer primarily believed, in the wake of Sartre's perspective, that cinema is characterized by some kind of coincidence between consciousness and perception – a coincidence that had already been hinted at by contemporary American literature, highly valued by Sartre and other French intellectuals of that time. Less and less inclined to agree, after 'Cinema, an Art of Space', that the twentieth-century phenomenological legacy (Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, etc.) could account for a *cinematic* coincidence between consciousness and perception, he ultimately turned to Kant to find a proper theoretical background for it. Put differently: Rohmer never questioned *that* cinema stood for a substantial coincidence between consciousness and perception, but at some point he realized that he had to turn to Kant (as opposed to twentieth-century phenomenological legacy) in order to find out *what* this coincidence is supposed to mean.

Stromboli enacted the quintessentially Kantian match: that between a self-consciousness, which can be emphatically nowhere but in apperception itself (thus entailing the triumph of *showing*, viz. of exteriority over interiority), and the 'redemption' of the very impossibility of cognitive self-reflection by means of the self-imposition (through practical reason) known as *freedom*. Thereby, Rohmer found in Kant the ontological framework he could not find in Sartre: he found a suitable, proper foundation for his conception of appearance for appearance's sake in *the tight interrelation between the impossibility of cognitive self-reflection, ethics and beauty*. That film persuaded Rohmer that cinema's 'lack of consciousness' (viz. the fact that it embodied the utter absence of self-consciousness apart from the 'I think' accompanying the apperception) distinguishing it from the novel is tenable only when it is accompanied by ethics (i.e. by the 'reformulation' of the very impossibility of self-reflection by means of practical reason)

and beauty (for very similar reasons). What makes cinema 'more novelistic than the novel itself' and that which accomplishes the novel's vocation to *show* is that therein self-consciousness is *indeed* nothing ('appearance for appearance's sake') – but then it must resurface in a diffracted way through freedom and beauty. Therefore, cinema *must* tackle freedom and beauty, much as in Kant's three-fold *Critiques* system experience and knowledge bear a complex, but doubtlessly very tight relationship with ethics and aesthetics.

Rohmer's two pieces about Alfred Hitchcock's *The Rope* (1948) are somewhat indicative in this respect. In 1950, before his conversion, he wrote a very long and rather confused treatise trying to infer from that film (famously entirely made of a single-take) a general theory of cinema, one in which visual continuity had the lion's share. Such an attempt, however, rather blatantly failed: 'Etude technique de *La Corde*' does not really succeed in positing a single coherent and rounded argument. When he wrote again on the same film in 1957, in his monograph on the English/American director, he tackled both Hitchcock's technical *tour de force* and the *moral* implications of the plot.

More generally, throughout the 1950s, the *école Schérer* (éS) as well as the *politique des auteurs* (pda) strongly insisted on the inseparability between ethics and aesthetics. 'Aesthetic criteria are linked to moral criteria; there are successful films and failures, but there are also noble films and abject ones. There is an artistic morality, which has nothing to do with current morality, but which exists.'[59] Some years after he wrote that 'the beauty of a film goes beyond eyes and ears. Because art is always a matter of *moral* beauty as soon as it becomes worthy of the man who chose it,'[60] Rivette went as far as to say that the inseparability between ethics and aesthetics is the 'fundamental question at the heart of cinematic creation.'[61] Film directors, whom many consider *auteurs* (and whom the éS/pda critics themselves deeply admired), like King Vidor and Raoul Walsh, do not belong in the éS/pda's pantheon, since they lack a moral point of view towards man.[62]

59 Truffaut, 'Le règne du cochon de payant est terminé', p. 5. Translation taken from Eugene P. Walz, *François Truffaut: A Guide for References and Resources*, p. 219.

60 Rivette, 'Les malheurs d'Orphée', pp. 1-2. Originally: 'La beauté d'un film dépasse les yeux et les oreilles. Car c'est toujours d'une beauté *morale* qu'un art relève dès qu'il devient digne de l'homme qui l'a choisi.'

61 Originally: 'question fondamentale au coeur de la création cinématographique.' In the same article ('A la cinémathèque tous les soirs l'âge d'or allemand'), Rivette also maintains that this inseparability made German Expressionism one of the most crucial cinematic trends ever, one that directly influenced the best directors of Hollywood's classical era.

62 See Demonsablon, 'L'image de la folie', pp. 51-52.

In 'Cinema, an Art of Space', Rohmer identified consciousness still in a fairly Heideggerian/Sartrean fashion: consciousness is 'embedded' within appearance; appearance reveals Being by means of a consciousness nihilating from Being and thereby proving faithful to the nothingness of Being. The new answer (less straightforwardly Kantian than ensuing from a rather personal appropriation of the German philosopher) to the question 'where is the place for consciousness?' would sound more or less as follows: *consciousness is nothing but a by-product of a struggle taking place outside of consciousness, namely the struggle between nature and morality, the cause-effect mechanical necessity characterizing appearances the way they appear to us, versus freedom*. The 'Kantian' revelation, which Rohmer fully endorses 'against' Sartre, is that consciousness is by all means on the outside, and not inside ourselves, yet this outside happens to be *at the intersection between nature and freedom/morality*.

That is to say, if we follow Rohmer's argument closely, we must conclude that, for him, if consciousness cannot be reflexively located 'in ourselves', then it has to be located in the battlefield where nature and freedom/morality *as such* face each other – a battlefield that is *nowhere in particular*, or, more precisely, that cannot be individuated in a definite consciousness. In *Stromboli*, the battle does not take place in Karen's consciousness: in the final sequence, Karen is literally a powerless little thing, adrift amidst the battle between nature and God (that is, morality) – a battle that is simultaneously abstract and placeless as well as totally concrete and situated. In this respect, Rohmer ostensibly departs from Kant (who still maintained a localizability of sorts for consciousness), in that this 'de-centrement' is one of the not-so-rare implications of his original rejection of phenomenology that, even more than rejoining Kant per se, are not without recalling Deleuze's later 'eccentric' appropriation of Kant (minus his Bergsonism) instead. Indeed, Kant could not take into account an 'externalized imagination' such as that which characterizes cinema according to Astruc's 'Dialectique et cinéma': thereby, cinema engenders a temporalization that departs from the contingency of Heideggerian/Sartrean consciousnesses thanks to the mechanical necessity and irreversibility of its unfolding *outside of* human consciousness, which makes it particularly suitable for accommodating a battle between the rule (Kantian nature: the totality of appearances qua submitted to the mechanical laws of cause-and-effect) and its exception (freedom/morality) whose seat is *not* inside man. Rather, the latter's consciousness can only get sucked in that battle from without, as it were, instead of hosting it.

> Ever since the cinema attained the dignity of an art, I see only one great theme that it proposed to develop: the opposition of two orders

> – one natural, the other human; one material, the other spiritual; one mechanical, the other free; one of the appetite, the other of heroism or grace – a classical opposition, but one that our art is privileged to be able to translate so well that the intermediary of the sign is replaced by immediate evidence.[63]

In this passage, which clearly outlines what the 'battlefield' is that defines cinema, Kantian dualism is paired with the expression/manifestation divide: only appearance for appearance's sake (as opposed to the linguistic sign) can account for the noumenal realm of freedom, that is, to the realm that breaks away with the rule of causality in that it is the realm of that which is its own cause, an end in itself.

'Appearance for appearance's sake' is, as we have seen, that which makes cinema more novelistic than the novel itself, viz. that which sets cinema free from its original proximity to the novel. On the other hand, this still begs the question of whether this apparent 'liberation' from the narrow horizon of the novel is, in fact, still essentially literary. In other words, this Kantian overcoming of Heideggerian/Sartrean novelistic aesthetics may be a dream that the novel is unable to make real, but still *the novel's* dream nonetheless: when push comes to shove, this Rohmerian conception of cinema boils down to the realization of the novelistic dream of showing instead of telling, supplemented by a suitable ontological framework (and this too was something the Sartre-inflected literary theory of his day attempted to provide contemporary novel with). Moreover, one should not forget that in the interview (with Jean Narboni) opening this chapter, Rohmer admitted that, to a certain degree, Sartre's influence even reached as far as his first films (shot in the 1960s), so he was fully aware that that 'literary' perspective still informed his thoughts on cinema well into the 1950s. An in-depth investigation in Rohmer's hundreds of articles and reviews seems to confirm this suspicion: indeed, a heavy literary bias affects his film criticism. He never (not even after his conversion) stopped looking at films with the eye of a literary critic. He always paid more attention than his alleged 'purely cinematic' *parti pris* would have allowed, to plot verisimilitude, to the *peinture de milieu* (the accurate, unclichéd depiction of a certain social or human environment), to the distance from which the narrator tells the story, to tonal coherence – in short: to a 'realism' to be conceived in unmistakably, ultra-traditional literary terms.[64]

63 Rohmer, 'Of Three Films and a Certain School', p. 64.

64 Dozens of reviews could be put forward as so many examples; among them, 'Pic nic'; 'Les feux du music-hall'; 'Mitsou'; 'Blanches colombes et vilains messieurs'.

Moreover, in many cases, Rohmer felt the same kind of embarrassment most typically felt by literary critics when faced with particularly uninteresting films: he had little to no idea what to say about them. It might look like a particularly brutal and ungenerous thing to say, but indeed in a great deal of reviews the critic is found beating about the bush,[65] and saying specious, not-so-pertinent things just to fill up an otherwise clueless piece of writing. The author himself even half-admitted it, when he said that when a film is particularly devoid of charms, he liked to deliberately neglect the film in question, and focus instead on what it *should have been*, on what are the implicit, possibly as-yet-unknown rules of cinema it should have complied with.[66] This goes a long way towards accounting for the fact that Rohmer is in many respects a literary critic that turned film theorist every now and then in order to better appease literary expectations ('cinema as more novelistic than novel itself') that films were only occasionally capable to satisfy.

All biographical sources agree that Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer and Truffaut got to know each other between 1949 and 1950. As said earlier, it occurred mainly in the *Ciné-Club Quartier Latin* run by Rohmer and Frédéric Froeschel. However, it should be added that *La Gazette du cinéma*, a movie magazine also run by Rohmer, which issued 'Roberto Rossellini: *Stromboli*' on the front page of its fifth and last number (November 1950), was no less important for the coming together of the éS.[67]

This short-lived publication only lasted five issues, spanning from May to November 1950, but can be said to have marked the transition between the pre- and post-conversion eras.[68] On the one hand, its second issue (June 1950) included the republication of a 1931 article by Jean-Paul Sartre ('Le cinéma n'est pas une mauvaise école'); on the other hand, in October 1950, Godard wrote there that Sartre's novels were 'third-rate literature.'[69]

65 For instance, throughout the first part of 'The Art of Caricature: Tashlin'.

66 For instance, in 'Vincent Van Gogh', or in 'Ces voyous d'hommes'.

67 It might be worth stressing that their group was never official, never proclaimed or formed as such. It was just an unofficial, informal convergence among a handful of like-minded cinephiles.

68 De Baecque, *Les Cahiers du Cinéma: histoire d'une revue*, pp. 44-49.

69 Godard, '*Works of Calder* and *L'Histoire d'Agnès*', p. 19. Godard was never particularly tender with Sartre in the 1950s: the *Godard on Godard* (*GoG*) collection confirms that whenever he mentioned the writer and philosopher in that decade, he did so rather scathingly – or neutrally at best. In 1960, a long article by Luc Moullet ('Jean-Luc Godard') that can legitimately be reputed the first serious and extensive study on Godard ever published, ends with a brief but violent attack against Sartre, whose theatrical pieces are said to be characterized by the refusal of what exists and by a morose intellectualism, as opposed to the livelier universe of comics and of Godard's films. Far more often than not, Rohmer expressed his rejection of Sartre more 'diplomatically', although he was occasionally surprisingly sarcastic: 'The author of *Nausea* is

Truffaut, on the contrary, liked them,[70] but he never even opened Sartre's books on philosophy (which he admitted to not understanding).[71]

It is extremely telling that Godard started off 'Defense and Illustration of Classical Construction', a 1952 essay he published in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* (*CC*), by distancing himself from Sartre.

> One remembers the vehemence with which Jean-Paul Sartre once attacked François Mauriac: the author of *Anges Noirs*, he said, was incapable of endowing his heroes with the liberty with which our lives are adorned, the sudden desire to alter a given course, and in a monstrous parody made them hesitate only in order to ape the magnificence of God. But what vanity, too, to insist at all costs on crediting language with a certain metaphysical quality, when it could only raise to the level of the sublime in very specific circumstances.[72]

Against Sartre (whom he deemed as mistaken as Mauriac), here Godard is retorting that in the artistic pursuit of freedom, language should not be overestimated; most of the rest of the article argues (if somewhat obscurely) that appearance for appearance's sake is much fitter for that purpose instead. In the closing paragraph, he laments 'the error of critics in falling under the influence of contemporary philosophy,' that is, 'in stripping classical psychology of that part of it which the cinema could make use of, render explicit, by not reducing man to "the succession of appearances by which

no more gifted for cinema than he is for pop songs – and about ten years ago, as you may know, Juliette Greco [...].' Originally: 'L'auteur de la *Nausée* n'est pas plus doué pour le cinéma que pour la chansonnette, car vous souvenez peut-être qu'il y a quelque dix ans, Juliette Greco [...].' Rohmer, 'Faux coupables et faux innocents', p. 763.

70 In 1951, on 12 November, he wrote his friend Robert Lachenay 'You would greatly benefit from reading Sartre and you would often recognize yourself in those writings of his in which he extols rationality, unemotional intelligence, the triumph of the will, the permanent responsibility of man towards his actions, etc.' Truffaut, *Letters*, p. 68. Still, this looks far from being enough to label Truffaut 'a Sartrean' in any serious way. Despite Steven Lipkin's efforts to downsize it (Lipkin, *The film criticism of François Truffaut*, pp. 141-142, p. 219 and pp. 236-237), thereby trying to portray Truffaut as a young Sartrean, the critic's absolute political and social disengagement is a gulf irretrievably separating the two; in this respect, Truffaut is much closer to the 'hussars', the sternly anti-Sartrean, right-wing, postwar French writers advocating literature for literature's sake, as far as it can be from political engagement. Not incidentally, it is one of the hussars (Jacques Laurent) who hired Truffaut as a film critic for his *Arts* weekly magazine, in 1954. See also Grosoli, 'The Politics and Aesthetics of the *politique des auteurs*'.

71 De Baecque and Guigue (eds.), *Le dictionnaire Truffaut*, pp. 351-352.

72 Godard, 'Defense and Illustration of Classical Construction', p. 26.

he is manifest" (Jean-Paul Sartre)'[73] – in other words, by attesting to the fact that appearance for appearance's sake is the highroad to the noumenal (free) side of man.

Both Godard and Rivette consistently contributed to the *Gazette*;[74] their articles show very clearly the strong influence of the older friend and colleague. Rivette, for instance, employed in that publication spiritualistic undertones that are much harder to find in his later *CC* articles.[75] More to the point, his first two articles extensively draw inspiration from Rohmer's 'Cinema, an Art of Space' and 'The Romance Is Gone'. Only the second one ('The Southerner'[76]) was published in the *Gazette*, while 'Nous ne sommes plus innocents' ('We Are Not Innocent Anymore'[77]) appeared in the *Bulletin intérieur du Ciné-club du Quartier Latin* (the internal bulletin of the Ciné-Club run by Rohmer) in January 1950.

The latter draws a distinction ('synthesis' vs. 'analysis') that ostensibly follows the one Rohmer drew between ontology and language. In short, 'synthetic' filmmaking consists of the deployment of appearances according to an internal logic of their own, in 'appearance for appearance's sake' manifesting nothing beyond the appearances through which everything is manifested, while 'analytic' filmmaking neglects the autonomous power of appearances and articulates them in such a way that they are made into conventional signs, into inert material to be used to express a point through linguistic and rhetorical abstractions. Importantly, Rivette also adds that the former is eminently spatial, while the latter, parcelling out filmic space, is temporal.

> The great error, then, seems to be the error of an everyday language, indifferent to its object, that of having a 'grammar' valid to any and all narratives, instead of a necessary style, a style needed by the narrative—indeed, gradually created by it in the course of its expression. [...] 'Content', in its natural effort to express itself, becomes form and language: the living organism is not formless [...], the fact of passing into

73 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

74 Truffaut did not, but Eugene P. Walz, in his *François Truffaut: A Guide for References and Resources*, pp. 161-162, lists three notes Truffaut wrote for the *Bulletin intérieur du Ciné-club du Quartier Latin* (the internal bulletin of the Ciné-Club run by Rohmer) in 1950.

75 It may suffice to mention his references to the dualism between flesh and spirit in his 'Under Capricorn' and 'Les malheurs d'Orphée'.

76 Rivette, 'The Southerner', p. 2.

77 Rivette, 'Nous ne sommes plus innocents' (http://sensesofcinema.com/2011/feature-articles/we-are-not-innocent-anymore/).

> being, into appearance, shapes it automatically—at least, if no 'regret', no prejudice, no complex, no (paralyzing) stench of the ancient rhetoric throws off the game.

'Synthetic' filmmaking (what has been called 'manifestation' in Rohmer's case) consists of a dynamic unity between form and content: as the latter unfolds, it displays its own form. Like in 'appearance for appearance's sake', as the content comes into view a 'nothingness' beyond itself is revealed, a nothingness that nonetheless shapes and qualifies the content; this nothingness is *form*, which is thus ultimately inseparable from its related content. Conversely, 'analytic' filmmaking (what has been called 'expression' in Rohmer's case) breaks this unity and separates form from content: the former is basically a language that expresses the latter. Rohmer's 1954 statement that '[with cinema in general, and with cinemascope in particular] no longer will we speak of framing or lighting; instead, we will talk about landscapes and light'[78] could be fittingly translated in Rivettian terms with 'with cinema in general and with cinemascope in particular, no longer will we regard cinema analytically, but synthetically': whilst 'framing' and 'lighting' still presuppose a separation between the thing to be shown and the expressive means whereby it gets shown, 'landscapes' and 'light' imply their inseparability.

One more thing that should not be overlooked is the subtly strategic value of that word choice, in the context of Rohmer's anti-Sartrean polemics. Sartre praised Faulkner, Dos Passos, Caldwell *et al.* precisely because of the primacy of synthesis over analysis in their books.

> The intellectual analysis which, for more than a century, had been the accepted method of developing character in fiction was no longer anything but an old mechanism badly adapted to the needs of the time. It was opposed to a psychology of synthesis which taught us that a psychological fact is an indivisible whole. It could not be used to depict a group of facts which present themselves as the ephemeral or permanent unity of a great number of perceptions. [...] The heroes of Hemingway and Caldwell never explain themselves – do not allow themselves to be dissected. They act only. [...] [E]ach of their spontaneous reactions is complete, what it would be in real life – something that lives and that does not contemplate itself. We learned from Hemingway to depict, without commentaries, without explanations, without moral judgements, the actions of our characters.

78 Rohmer, 'The Cardinal Virtues of Cinemascope', p. 281.

> The reader understands them because he sees them born and formed in a situation which has been made understandable to him. They live because they spurt suddenly as from a deep well. To analyze them would be to kill them.[79]

By appropriating the synthesis/analysis dichotomy, Rivette shifts its meaning: for him, 'analysis' designates not just intellectual analysis, but *every* technique contriving a temporal articulation meant to express something. Hence, literary techniques were, to him, analytical. By means of this shift, Rivette implied (exactly like Rohmer in his review of Magny's treatise, in Chapter one, and even though he does not really spell this out) that American contemporary novels, clearly making large use of those essentially literary techniques, were still stuck in that 'temporal/linguistic/analytical bias' that only cinema could truly, 'synthetically' overcome, in that it can rely on a fully spatial deployment of time, freeing it from the need of techniques. By reinventing the very divide brandished by Sartre to promote American contemporary literature, Rivette, in contrast with Sartre, indirectly ranges the novelistic as such (thus including contemporary American novelists themselves) under the 'analysis' variety. According to his own revised categorization, only what is more novelistic than the novel itself (i.e. cinema) can be synthetic.

Tellingly, this implicitly 'anti-Sartrean' nuance is accompanied in the same article by traces of Kantian 'critical' approach, and of German idealism coming in its aftermath.

> The universe commands this gaze [the gaze of the creator], and yet the gaze itself both imposes and creates this universe; the universe of the creator is but the manifestation, the concrete efflorescence of his gaze and mode of appearing —of this gaze that is nothing other than the appearance of a universe. [...] Universe and gaze, one and the other are the same and only reality: reality only exists through the gaze we direct at it, and the gaze, conversely, depends entirely on its relationship to reality. Indissociable reality, where appearance and appearing are confused, where vision can seem to create matter (Renoir's travelling shots), and matter can seem implicated in vision—without anteriority, or causal relation. One sole and selfsame reality with two faces, confused and fused in the created work.

79 Sartre, 'American Novelists in French Eyes', p. 117.

As for Rivette's review of Jean Renoir's 1945 *The Southerner*, it is little more than a thorough application of the principles outlined in 'Nous ne sommes plus innocents', on that film in particular.[80]

In the fourth issue of the *Gazette* (October 1950), Rivette violently distanced himself from the staff of the *Objectif 49* festival, whose second and last edition (organized, among others, by the future co-founders of the *CC* Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and André Bazin) had taken place in Biarritz one month before. Rivette's article[81] was the implicit sign that a small group was born (the éS), and that its members thought of themselves as quite apart from the rest of the conspicuously Sartre-inflected cinephilia milieu of the day. More or less in the same weeks (September-October 1950), the *Ciné-Club Quartier Latin* underwent some troubles with justice because Rohmer and the others organized a screening of Nazi propaganda film *Jud Süß* (Veit Harlan, 1940), which predictably stirred up a massive controversy, as the war was still too close in time.[82] Such 'political eccentricities' were as far as they could be from the leftist political engagement of Sartrean existentialism. As was mentioned already at the end of our Introduction, one year before, Rohmer was kicked out of *Les Temps modernes*, Sartre's own monthly organ, for having written a sentence that could be read as reactionary,[83] namely that '[s]ince it is agreed to swear only by History,

80 'In Renoir's films, the camera often seems to be the creator of the universe – and isn't it because the camera tightly embraces the unfolding, the perpetual spouting of the universe, and *submits* itself to it? And for a long time now, this selfsame concern for a perfect capture has pushed Renoir to grasp the real in its totality as well as the coexistence of its phenomena, to refuse to undo the knot of actions and reactions, so as to seize it globally; all this implies an increasingly advanced realism of space.' Originally: 'Si, chez Renoir, la caméra semble souvent créatrice de l'univers, n'est-ce pas parce-qu'elle en épouse étroitement le déroulement, le jaillissement perpétuel, et s'y *soumet*? Et ce même souci de parfaite captation incite depuis longtemps Renoir à appréhender le réel dans sa totalité et la coéxistance de ses phénomènes, à se réfuser à dénouer le noeud d'actions et réactions, pour le saisir globalement et implique un réalisme de l'espace toujours plus poussé.' To shoot things 'synthetically' means to seize them 'in a global way', to insist on their coexistence. Accordingly, Renoir's film highlights that which wraps things together: *space*. His direction focuses on spaces: 'The nakedness, the rigour of natural settings, and the leitmotif of those scanty wooden boards, forming the peristyle of that domestic temple where everybody sits next to each other; lying at the intersection between the house and the fields, they knot the setting together.' Originally: 'La nudité, la rigueur des décors naturels, et le leit-motiv de ces quelques marches de bois, péristyle de ce temple domestique où l'on vient s'asseoir côte à côte; à l'intersection de la maison et des champs, elles sont le noeud du décor.' Rivette, 'The Southerner', p. 2.

81 Rivette, 'Bilan pour Biarritz'.

82 De Baecque and Herpe, *Eric Rohmer*, p. 60.

83 Rohmer recounted this anecdote in 'The Critical Years', p. 32.

let's say that at a certain period of the evolution of the arts, the values of conservation should perhaps take over those of revolution or progress.'[84]

As far as one can tell from his texts, Godard immediately backed Rohmer's return to Kant and to his philosophical aftermath. After having employed, for no apparent reason, the German word *Aufklärung* instead of the French *Lumières* (or the English *Enlightenment*) in one of his last contributions[85] for the *Gazette du cinéma*, in the very issue where Rohmer's review of *Stromboli* was published, Godard called the first article he wrote for the *CC* 'Suprématie du sujet' ('Supremacy of the subject'). In it, he constantly played with the ambivalence of the French term *sujet*, which can mean 'subject matter' as well as 'the subject' in the philosophical sense. A review of *Strangers on a Train* (1951), 'Suprématie du sujet' repeatedly compared Hitchcock ('The most German of transatlantic directors'[86]) to intellectual figures who variously grappled with Kantian legacy, like Kleist and Goethe.

More generally, it can be argued that the 'transcendental turn' embraced by Rohmer *contra* Sartre came at a particularly delicate moment, when the éS was still in the process of coming together as a group. As a result, it very deeply affected that still malleable clique in the short as well as in the long run. This sort of 'big bang' decisively contributed to the shaping of the shared assumptions informing the éS. Thereby, it laid the foundations for the pda to emerge years later, since the pda's view of authorship (as will be shown in the follow-up book of the present study) was rooted in a conception of subjectivity deeply relying on Kant and on that part of German philosophy which came in its wake.

After Rossellini's film, Rohmer's aesthetics of cinema reached, to borrow an image from André Bazin, an 'equilibrium profile', and will remain consistent and steady until the end of his career as a film critic, without ever undergoing any significant change. This is why the next chapters do not shy away from using articles he wrote during the later pda phase (1954-1960) to illustrate the main assumptions underlying the éS's film criticism in earlier years: because the éS was undoubtedly Rohmer-centric, and because Rohmer's film criticism and its underpinning premises remained in essence the same throughout the 1950s, no serious methodological problem arises if some texts Rohmer wrote in the late 1950s are used here to account for the general leaning of the éS.

84 Rohmer, 'Le Festival du film maudit', p. 765.

85 Godard, '*The Great Mac Ginty*'.

86 Godard, 'Strangers on a Train', p. 24. Actually, he once said the exact same thing about Fritz Lang, in an article that has not been included in the English collection *GoG*, but does appear in the original French version: Godard, 'Le retour de Frank James', p. 92.

The previous pages have hopefully shown that Rohmer was probably not a very orthodox Kantian: his appropriation of the German philosopher was, to some extent, fairly loose and nonchalant, and looked less like a thorough application of Kant's teaching and more like a will to endorse what Sartre had discarded. Moreover, according to the biography by Antoine De Baecque and Noël Herpe, Rohmer closely read Kant only in the late Eighties,[87] which implies that in the Forties and Fifties his knowledge of his works was mainly indirect, and probably derived for the most part from Alain.

At any rate, Rohmer's attitude towards film criticism, theory and aesthetics was indeed singularly systematic. Even if he retracted his own past dogmatism more than once in the later decades of his life,[88] in 1996 he would still structure an entire book around Kant's critiques: his *De Mozart en Beethoven* is split in two sections, one of which reads Mozart as the embodiment of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, while the other reads Beethoven as that of the *Critique of Practical Reason*.[89] Of course, to have a square, systematic way of thinking about films does not necessarily mean to be interested in putting together a systematic theory of film (which he never did). He was rather diffident towards theoretical systems, when it came to film: 'Nothing goes out of fashion as quickly as systems. Ideas come and go, but images remain.'[90] One thing is sure: Rohmer firmly believed that cinema was the crowning moment of a solidly traditional, centuries-old conception of art.

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87 De Baecque and Herpe, *Eric Rohmer*, p. 386.

88 'Le celluloid et le marbre', his 5-instalments series of articles that he published in the *CC* during the course of 1955, and that strove to put together an aesthetic system to be based on a set of comparisons between cinema and the other arts, was disowned some years after its publication (Rohmer, 'The Critical Years', p. 1); in 2001, he distanced himself from the views on Cinemascope he had expressed in the 1950s (Rohmer, 'Le large et le haut').

89 Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, especially pp. 295-298.

90 Rohmer, 'Livres de cinéma', *CC*, 74 (August-September 1957), p. 57. Originally: 'Rien ne se démode plus vite que les systèmes. Les idées passent et les images restent.'

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Abbreviations

CC = *Cahiers du Cinéma*
éS = *école Schérer*
GoG = Tom Milne (ed. and trans.), *Godard on Godard*. London and New York: Da Capo, 1972.
pda = *politique des auteurs*
ToB = Jean Narboni and Eric Rohmer (eds.), *The Taste of Beauty*, trans. by Carol Volk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

4. The Art of Nature

Grosoli, Marco, *Eric Rohmer's Film Theory (1948-1953). From 'école Schérer' to 'Politique des auteurs'*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

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Abstract
This chapter investigates the consequences of Rohmer's conversion to Kant on the main tenets of his film theory. The concept of *appearance for appearance's sake*, which was already of primary importance before his conversion, underwent substantial revision thanks to the influence of Kantian notions of beauty, of nature, and, specifically, natural beauty (as outlined in the *Critique of Judgement*). Particular attention has been devoted to the intricacies of Kant's *unity of nature*, in that they string together three of Rohmer's key assumptions, namely that cinema is essentially an art of movement, that by the same token it is a narrative art, and that by pushing mechanism to the extreme cinema can attain freedom.

Keywords: Rohmer, Kant, appearance, nature, beauty, mechanism

4.1. To show and not to tell

How did this conversion change Rohmer's film criticism in actuality? How did it affect the *école Schérer* (éS) more generally? In order to attempt to answer these questions, it is probably best to start with what remained more or less the same.

Ever since 'Cinema, an Art of Space', Rohmer repeatedly insisted that cinema is on the side of ontology, and not on that of language; his 'return to Kant' (from and against the twentieth-century phenomenological strand of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, etc.) was undertaken precisely in order to maintain this premise.

> By placing myself under the patronage of Kant from the very outset, I intended my approach to belong to the order of ontology, and not to that of language. And I don't think that the two can ever converge. In the first case, value (i.e. beauty) is the constant object of attention, in that it is an essential

> attribute of the very nature of art. In the second case, the interest lies first and foremost in communication; and semiology, which is made to study its conditions, should in principle almost completely disregard such value.[1]

From the outset, then, Rohmer subscribed to what Ian Aitken called the deeply Kant-inflected 'intuitionist modernist-realist paradigm,'[2] one of the two dominant traditions that dominated European film theory in the past century (the other being the 'post-Saussurian' one encompassing, among others, semiotics, structuralism and post-structuralism). Even as late as his 1983 interview with Jean Narboni, which accompanied the edited collection of his writings, while admitting that he had changed his mind about many things by then, Rohmer firmly maintained this stance.[3] Moreover, the adoption of the Kantian framework enabled him to further tighten the correlation the critic never ceased to believe in, viz. that between the 'ontology vs. language' and the 'showing vs. telling' divides. In Rohmer's mind, the fact that 'the specificity of the cinematic screen is less about suggesting, as theorists used to think in the past, than it is about "showing"'[4] is inevitably linked to what has been named (already in Chapter one) 'manifestation' as opposed to 'expression'.

'Long live the cinema, which, attempting only to show, exempts us from the fraud of saying!';[5] shortly thereafter, Godard affirmed that the goal of cinematographic *mise en scène* 'is not to express but to represent,'[6] and Bazin

1 Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, p. 52. Originally: 'Si je me suis placé, dès le début, sous le patronage de Kant, c'est pour bien marquer que ma démarche entend être de l'ordre de l'ontologie, et non du langage. Et, entre l'une et l'autre approche, je ne pense pas qu'il y ait de convergence possible. Dans la première, la valeur – la beauté –, étant attribut essentiel de l'être même de l'art, est le constant objet du propos. Dans la seconde, l'intérêt se porte avant tout chose sur la communication; et la sémiologie, faite pour étudier les modalités de celle-ci, devrait en principe faire de la valeur abstraction plus ou moins totale.'

2 Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema*. In fact, strong parallelisms can be drawn between most of the topics tackled in this chapter, or elsewhere in this book (manifestation vs. expression, the similarities and differences between artistic and natural beauties, the diffidence towards Sartre's conception of imagination as opposed to perception, and so on and so forth), and several parts of Alain's *Systeme des beaux arts*. However, as shown by Georges Canguilhem (in 'Réflexions sur la création artistique selon Alain'), the main inspiration behind most ideas in *Système des beaux arts*, even though Descartes, Plato and others play a considerable role in it, is unambiguously Kantian – which is yet another reason why our account focuses primarily on the German philosopher.

3 Rohmer, 'The Critical Years', pp. 10-11.

4 Rohmer, 'Queen Kelly'. Originally: 'Le propre de l'écran est moins de suggérer, comme pensaient les théoriciens d'alors, que de "donner à voir".'

5 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 49.

6 Godard, 'Strangers on a Train', p. 24.

was also well aware that, according to the *politique des auteurs* (pda), the cinema could not be reduced to that which it expressed.[7] Anything supposed to express a pre-existing inner being, like Paul Newman's actors'-studio-like acting,[8] or the long dialogues of an adaptation from Dostoyevsky boringly uttered by the actors in order to deliver the characters' psychology,[9] is firmly condemned. The éS/pda abhorred those directors who envisaged the moving image as a means to convey something, be it a definite emotional effect or a pre-determined meaning ('the cinema is not a "spectacle" [...], it would still be sad for it to be reduced to a piece of "writing"'[10]). It is no wonder that the éS/pda repeatedly lashed out at David Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1945), 'with its streams of tears and its amorously awkward couple-the least sensual and most sentimental film ever wept over.'[11] What was wrong in that film was that inner feelings were delicately suggested by actors' performances without being exhausted in the acting methods used to express them. Hence, they are 'sentimental' but not 'sensual': they are only alluded to, *pointed at* by the acting technicalities qua mere signs of feelings that remain in the mind of the characters, and that are artfully conveyed to the viewers in order to move them. Actors are mere mediators, from (imaginary, character's) mind to (actual, viewer's) mind, without any regard for the autonomous power of appearances – and the characters themselves are 'awkward' precisely because their passion remains only mental and is not lived to the fullest. By contrast, 'sensual' (although the original French text read *charnel*, 'carnal') feelings would be those which are nowhere but in their appearance;[12] put differently, those whose abstract definition does not exhaust the wealth of suggestions ensuing from their visual appearance. 'The idea springs from the sign and establishes it at the same time, just as an act affirms a tendency.'[13] As usual, Godard put it more lyrically: 'If the idea is involved in the form, it becomes more incisive, but is also imprisoned like water in ice.'[14] The sign ('that which

7 Bazin, 'How Could You Possibly Be a Hitchcocko-Hawksian?', p. 34.

8 Rohmer, 'Marqué par la haine'. Rohmer himself uses the word 'expressionism' to designate that style of acting.

9 Rohmer, 'Crime et châtiment'.

10 Rohmer, 'The Art of Caricature: Tashlin', p. 151.

11 Truffaut, 'The Seven Year Itch', p. 160. One of the many examples of denigration against *Brief Encounter* is in Truffaut, 'Ma vie à moi', p. 59.

12 Again, this explains the éS/pda's contempt for *ellipses*, that quintessentially literary device which conceals the appearance of phenomena in order to convey some meaning by forcing the reader/viewer to mentally represent what is missing.

13 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 49.

14 Godard, 'Strangers on a Train', p. 24.

indicates something in whose place it appears'[15]) is not meant to communicate something to, or to have a definite effect on the viewer, but 'should respect the arabesque which underlines its effect.'[16] In other words, it should be turned towards appearance for appearance's sake, rather than towards the intention to signify; towards the means rather than towards the ends.

The ideal *auteur* was not someone who had an idea and expressed it ('with Tashlin there is no starting point [the French original read: 'pas d'idée de départ', 'no starting idea'], and this is precisely his originality. Only the point of arrival matters'[17]), but someone in whose films 'the stroke surpasses the intentions of the hand drawing it.'[18] What matters is not the outcome of an original intention, but something that is *found* along the way. Godard, for instance, praised G.W. Pabst for directing the actors by subtracting all that is useless from their gestures, instead of creating these gestures from scratch, out of sheer motionlessness.[19] In other words, Pabst does not rely on some fixed, abstract intention preceding its physical realization,[20] but places his direction wholly within the moving flow of appearances: all that he does is to *pick* those appearances that are deemed as revealing, and to discard the others. 'It is completely clear, here, that the goal of the filmmaker is not so much a matter of expressing anything through images, but more a matter of leading us to a precise image he patiently sought with his hero.'[21] Ingmar Bergman is another good case in point: in his films, his abstract, philosophical intentions and pretensions are exceeded by the glory of that which meaninglessly appears and just shines.

> Not that we read fresh nuances in the facial expressions, which are destined to corroborate or contradict the meaning of the words. The 'plus' that the proximity of the profiles of this forty-year-old man and

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 Godard, '*The Lieutenant Wore Skirts*; *Artists and Models*', p. 36.

18 Rohmer, 'Luis Buñuel: The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz', p. 147.

19 Godard, 'Le Trésor'.

20 Like, for instance, John Huston. 'Thus, his mind clouded by a certain literary myth, the most "intelligent" filmmaker believes that he has completed the essential part of his task once his script has been written: he needs only to find mouthpieces for his ideas. Of course he has experience and knows that the actors must move, and so they move, but only because they have to. In certain scenes of *Beat the Devil*, Jennifer Jones says her lines while doing stretching exercises: it is a clever idea, but nothing more.' Rohmer, 'Lesson of a failure', p. 111.

21 Rohmer, 'Les fraises sauvages'. Originally: 'Le but du cinéaste, là, c'est flagrant, n'est pas tant d'exprimer quoi que ce soit par des images que de nous conduire à une image précise, patiemment recherchée par lui-même et son héros.'

> woman contributes – to which the cheated wife's profile, surprising the couple, will be added – is not, I believe, in the realm of expression. These faces, smooth and clear as cameos, exert a charm that is essentially less dramatic than poetic: They distract us from the words more than they help us understand them, but the medal-like forms with which they haunt us are the means by which we can break through their fundamental opacity, the same opacity that, at the beginning of the film, the noise of the train was enough to dissipate, like a puff of smoke.[22]

These close-ups seem to echo an earlier article by the same critic: 'Isn't there more in a troubled face than the emotion to which we would like to refer?'[23] Again: an image should not be the sign of something else, but appearance for appearance's sake. 'The appearance is the essence, and it draws upon itself the substance of an interior world, a world of which it is the incarnation, not the sign.'[24] A sign is inevitably (as per the quotation above) *opaque*, as the inside/outside relationship can only be loose and unstable (since the signifier/signified relationship can only be arbitrary and conventional). An 'incarnation' is even more opaque, because it does not say anything; at the same time, it knows no opacity, because it draws all of the inside to the outside, so that nothing is left within: no essence or intended meaning beyond what appears.

The main difference with the pre-conversion phase is that Rohmer is now much more inclined to emphasize *beauty* and *nature* than he was in, say, 'Cinema, an Art of Space' (where nature is simply absent and beauty is mentioned in passing no more than a couple of times). When he sets manifestation against expression, he does so out of conviction that cinema

22 Rohmer, 'Ingmar Bergman's *Dreams*', pp. 166-167. See also Rohmer, 'Avec le *Septième scéau*, Ingmar Bergman nous offre son *Faust*'. In *Det sjunde inseglet* (*The Seventh Seal*, 1957), says Rohmer, Bergman asks an abstract question about the meaning of life, death and time, but finds a thoroughly concrete answer, one that bears no relation to the question but all the more answers it: the mute, vivid manifestation of a 'dark forest' ('forêt aux futaies sombres') or of 'foaming sea' ('mer écumante'). The abstractions of fiction and death are exceeded by the power of sheer appearances: 'However heavily the director covers his characters' features with make-up, he knows how to preserve their shivering flesh and the intensity of their gaze: better still, he makes us feel that such flesh is in turn a mask, and contrasts it with the skeleton in the same way as he contrasts life with death. By doing so, he invites us to experience their disturbing affinity.' Originally: 'Quelle que soit la couche de fard dont le metteur en scène recouvre les traits de ses personnages, il sait préserver le frémissement de leur chair et l'intensité de leur regards: mieux, nous faire sentir que cette chair est masque à son tour, accentuer au maximum le contraste entre elle et le squelette, entre la vie et la mort, tout en nous invitant à éprouver leur inquiétante affinité.'

23 Rohmer, 'The Classical Age of Cinema', p. 42.

24 *Ibid.*

is able to manifest beauty in a straightforward, Kantian sense, viz. to display *aesthetic ideas*. 'By an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which evokes much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. concept, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never quite fully capture or render completely intelligible.'[25] Aesthetic ideas engender beauty insofar as they consist of a free play between imagination and understanding whereby (as we have seen in the last chapter) some kind of 'purposiveness without purpose' is created. It is a 'free' play because imagination synthesizes the manifold of appearances in such a way that understanding cannot provide any suitable concept for the result. Still, understanding is not ruled out: that representation of the imagination 'evokes much thought': if, on the one hand, no concept can match it, on the other hand that representation can *potentially* engender a number of concepts not unrelated to it, although none of them can be the actual, *ultimate* concept *of* it.

> In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, allied with a given concept, with which, in the free employment of imagination, such a multiplicity of partial representations are bound up, that no expression indicating a definite concept can be found for it – one which on that account allows a concept to be supplemented in thought by much that is indefinable in words, and the feeling of which enlivens the cognitive faculties, and with language, as a mere thing of the letter, combines spirit.[26]

When Rohmer and the pda referred to the coincidence between appearance and essence, 'essence' is none other than Kant's subjective purposiveness without purpose – which can correspond to a great variety of things: the quasi-cosmic 'order of the world'[27] suggested by *Journey to Italy*; the clockwork-perfect choreographic harmony of movements and lines in a Hollywood musical;[28] *Bitter Victory*'s (Nicholas Ray, 1957) 'Architectural, cosmic beauty' ('beauté architecturale, cosmique') due to its composition of a series of tightly interconnected parallelisms and correspondences ('Every situation is not only reconsidered according to its on-screen appearance, but also according to something more elevated, to this necessity characteristic

25 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, § 49, 314.
26 *Ibid.*, § 49, 316.
27 Rohmer, 'Land of Miracles', p. 207.
28 Rohmer, 'Ma soeur est du tonnerre'.

of the filmed work – whose presence I detected without completely feeling it. There is, for instance, a parallelism between the scene in which Brand hesitates to kill the sentry, and the moment when he lets the scorpion climb onto Leith's sock'[29]), and so on and so forth.

'Appearance for appearance's sake' should be read in a similar way. It stands for the coincidence between appearance and essence, viz. for a cinematic appearance displaying some kind of internal harmony and coherence (a 'purposiveness without purpose' grasped in this way by a subject), thereby manifesting an aesthetic idea that does not just express a concept (it is not a sign pointing at something else), but by its very appearing can *potentially* engender a wealth of concepts in the observer. 'Everything speaks, and yet nothing is encouraged to speak' ('Tout parle et pourtant rien n'est sollicité').[30] This is why it would make sense to say that the pda's metaphysics of essence and appearance ultimately comes down to a matter of inside and outside: the sign goes from the inside to outside, while appearance for appearance's sake is primarily the triumph of the outside, and consequently a virtual movement from the outside to the inside.

> Doesn't a troubled face betray some interior emotion? Yes, it is a sign, but an arbitrary sign, as it denies the powers of falsity and greatly shrinks the limits of the invisible world to which it proudly refers. To go from each of our gestures to its implied intention is the equivalent of reducing all of thought to a few self-identical operations. The novelist will rightfully smile when presented with the neophyte's ambition to give this elementary algebra the name language. To go from the exterior to the interior, from behaviour to the soul, such is the condition of our art. But how wonderful that, far from tarnishing what it shows us, this necessary detour enhances it, and thus liberated, appearance itself is our guide.[31]

A sign presupposes an arbitrary connection between some inner being (some 'meaning') and some external placeholder (sign itself) whereby it is expressed. Appearance for appearance's sake designates a cinematic appearance rich enough in internal coherence (because its parts mutually interact

29 Rohmer, 'Seul film adulte à Venise: *Amère victoire*'. 'Toutes le situations sont repensées non seulement en fonction de leur expression sur l'écran, mais de quelque chose de plus élevé, de cette nécessité propre à l'oeuvre filmée dont je décelais la présence, sans la ressentir encore pleinement. Il y a, par exemple, un parallelisme entre la scène où Brand hésite à tuer la sentinelle, et celle où il laisse le scorpion grimper sur la chaussette de Leith.'

30 Rohmer, 'One Exciting Night'.

31 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', pp. 50-51.

so that the ensuing whole is characterized, in the eyes of the intuiting subject, by a sense of internal necessity, of 'purposiveness without purpose') to provoke some attribution of meaning in the mind of the viewer.

> The cinema flashes a whole scene before our eyes, from which we are free to extract one of many possible significations. This is opposed to the other arts, which go from the abstract to the concrete and which, in making this quest for the concrete their goal, hide the fact that they aim not to imitate but to signify. Meaning in film is extracted from appearances, not from an imaginary world of which the appearances are only the sign.[32]

An effective definition by Paul Willemen is particularly worth noting here:

> [The discourse of revelation] takes many forms in relation to cinema. The whole argument around realism hinges on a discourse of revelation just as the whole *Cahiers du Cinéma* auteur polemic basically was a discourse of revelation, the revelation of the soul. Whether it was the soul of the viewer being projected onto the screen, the soul of the actress being revealed in Rossellini's *Stromboli* or the soul of Hitchcock being revealed in *I Confess*, there was always a discourse of revelation under it all in different modalities.[33]

What matters is not *who* carries the attribution of meaning (the director? The viewer?), or *what* meaning exactly should be attributed, but *that* an appearance potentially rich in meaning is displayed. What matters is less the subjective acknowledgement of 'purposiveness without purpose', than the fact that that acknowledgement is objectively commanded by (transcendentally mediated, in the Kantian sense) appearances. The pda's 'discourse of revelation' was basically an emphasis on the power of cinema to show that the source of every possible meaning lies in outward appearance, qua non reducible to meaning (because stemming from a synthesis of the imagination that cannot properly match one definite concept of the understanding). The point was appearance as *potential* meaning ('manifestation'); its actualization ('expression') mattered little, and much less who exactly was to trigger it. The point was, in other words, the displacement of the subject's soul and inner thoughts *on the outside*, that is, the acknowledgement that they cannot help

32 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
33 Willemen, *Looks and Frictions*, p. 232.

but be the secondary, contingent appendixes of a more proper formulation that is always external, foreign and independent.

Jean-Luc Godard once wrote that 'artistic creation does not mean painting one's soul in things, but painting the soul of things.'[34] He went on to offer an example: 'In Jean Renoir's *Madame Bovary*, it is a precious moment when, as Emma and Leon come out of the church, we suddenly breathe the smell of stone, and with it the musty flavour of life in Rouen and Emma's disappointed dreams.'[35] Immediately thereafter, however, he specified his claim so as to unambiguously discard the idea that things *actually have* a soul, which they would somehow ooze once they are filmed. Rather, when cinema reaches its potential and displays 'appearance for appearance's sake', things are filmed in such a way as to *encourage* the *projection* of feelings on them.

> Flaherty's genius, after all, is not so far removed from that of Hitchcock – Nanook hunting his prey is like a killer stalking his victims – and lies in identifying time with the desire which consumes it, guilt with suffering, fear and remorse with pleasure, and in making of space the tangible terrain of one's uneasiness. Art attracts us only by what it reveals of our most secret self.[36]

Tellingly, five years later, Rohmer would make use of the same comparison between Robert Flaherty's *Nanook* (1922) and Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), a film notoriously revolving around a character projecting his secret desires on the scenes he watches from his window, thereby making external appearance the very seat of his hidden and unconfessed drives.[37]

Moving images 'manifesting' instead of 'expressing' are moving images displaying aesthetic ideas. Therein, appearance for appearance's sake engenders a wealth of potential concepts in the viewer simply thanks to its beauty ('purposiveness without purpose'), rather than because a consciousness is virtually encompassed in it by means of nihilation/transcendence (as in the Murnau example from 'Cinema, an Art of Space'). *This* is the link between the 'showing vs. telling' opposition and 'ontology vs. language'. What cinema shows is not just ordinary, empirical appearances: through appearances it shows *Being*. However, there is nothing obscurely metaphysical about

34 Godard, 'What is Cinema?', p. 30.
35 *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.
36 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
37 Chabrol and Rohmer, *Hitchcock*, p. 124.

this Being: it is just an image *standing for all that could potentially be said about that image*, rather than for a definite content actually expressed by that image.

4.2. Natural beauty

In Kant's system, 'aesthetic ideas' typically characterize works of art. However, the German philosopher also dwells on another kind of beauty: *natural beauty*.

Here, Kant's opposition between *mechanism* and *teleology* (or, according to some translations, *purposiveness*) must promptly be recalled.[38] Like man, nature has to be conceived in a twofold way.[39] On the one hand, it is a blind *mechanism*, and is only made of the interaction between causes and effects. On the other hand, it has to be conceived *teleologically*, i.e. in such a way that the distinction itself between causes and effects, ends and means, is no longer operative.

> In so far as the causal connexion is thought merely by means of understanding it is a nexus constituting a series, namely of causes and effects, that is invariably progressive. The things that as effects presuppose others as their causes cannot themselves in turn be also causes of the latter. This causal connexion is termed that of efficient causes (*nexus effectivus*). On the other hand, however, we are also able to think a causal connexion according to a rational concept, that of ends, which, if regarded as a series, would involve regressive as well as progressive dependency. It would be one in which the thing that for the moment is designated effect deserves none the less, if we take the series regressively, to be called the cause of the thing of which it was said to be the effect. In the domain of practical matters, namely in art, we readily find examples of a nexus of this kind. Thus a house is certainly the cause of the money that is received as rent, but yet, conversely, the representation of this possible income was the cause of the building of the house. A causal nexus of this kind is termed that of final causes (*nexus finalis*).[40]

38 Kant's critique of teleological judgement is recapitulated in a particularly literal way in the fifth instalment of Rohmer's *Le celluloid et le marbre* series of articles: 'V. Architecture d'apocalipse', p. 24.

39 See, for instance, Zanetti, 'Teleology and the Freedom of the Self'.

40 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, § 65, 372.

A thing considered as a natural end (corresponding to what is generally called an *organism*) is a thing envisaged *as if* the concept of the global interactions of its parts had produced the parts themselves. The 'as if' here corresponds to Kant's admonishment that this is not a constitutive principle, but a regulative principle (i.e. there can be no confusion about the global concept of the thing having *actually* produced its parts). In this respect, a thing considered as a natural end is both cause and effect of itself, it is its own end. Kant is also well aware that there is a strong analogy between nature thus conceived and *art* (works of art are also ends in themselves, displaying purposiveness without a purpose) – hence the well-known analogy between the artist and God, as those overseeing final causes in art and nature. The artist and God cause the mechanisms known as 'work of art' and 'nature', while being exempt from the mechanic kind of causality. Like a work of art, a natural object conceived of as a natural end (an end in itself), must be characterized by an idea of the whole driving all its parts, and causing them to coalesce into this whole.

> But if a thing is a product of nature, and in this character is notwithstanding to contain intrinsically and in its inner possibility a relation to ends, in other words, is to be possible only as a natural end and independently of the causality of the concepts of external rational agents, then this second requisite is involved, namely, that the parts of the thing combine of themselves into the unity of a whole by being reciprocally cause and effect of their form. For this is the only way in which it is possible that the idea of the whole may conversely, or reciprocally, determine in its turn the form and combination of all the parts, not as cause – for that would make it an art-product – but as the ground for the cognition of the systematic unity of the form and combination of all the manifold contained in the given matter for the person judging it.[41]

The difference between nature and art is that the artist/Genius is like a watchmaker: it triggers a self-sufficient mechanism. Nature triggers *itself* instead (God is just the postulated 'self-triggering' entity). What art 'suggests to our minds is an artist – a rational being – working from without. But nature, on the contrary, organizes itself, and does so in each species of its organized products – following a single pattern, certainly, as to general features, but nevertheless admitting deviations calculated to secure

41 *Ibid.*, § 65, 373.

self-preservation under particular circumstances.'[42] When an object is externally perceived by some observer as an end in itself, in that it appears as a self-sufficient organized whole, then it is a work of art, or a natural end. The two nonetheless remain distinct from one another, because only the former is perceived as being due to a definite, separate agency.

Rohmer is undoubtedly aware of 'this notion of order, in which philosophers saw the foundations themselves of Beauty: such order rests on uniformity rather than diversity, as nature teaches us'[43] – and as late as 2009, in an interview with Noël Herpe and Philippe Fauvel, Rohmer still defined the cinematic 'natural' in Kantian terms, namely as that which seems to be endowed with an existence of its own, rather than to have been created by a creator.[44]

Indeed, his insistence on cinema's capacity to seize natural beauty could not be overestimated, and has been rightfully highlighted already by most commentators and film scholars. In fact, his writings seem to imply that whereas arts are normally confined to artistic beauty and its aesthetic ideas, leaving (as per Kant) natural beauty to nature alone, cinema has indifferently access to artistic *as well as* to natural beauty.

> Film [...] uses techniques that are instruments of reproduction or, one might say, of knowledge. In a sense, it possesses the truth right from the beginning and aims to make beauty its supreme end. A beauty, then, and this is the essential point, that is not its own but that of nature. A beauty that it has the mission of discovering, and not of inventing, of capturing like a prey, of almost abstracting from things.[45]

Jean Renoir, for instance, is praised because he knows that cinema 'is apt to capture the most wayward aspects of *nature*, those aspects that are least able to be reduced to the canons of aesthetics, its *freest* aspects.'[46]

Cinema's strong bias towards natural beauty caused Rohmer to assume that since cinema is supposed to tackle nature and reveal its beauty, one of the main tasks of film criticism lies in highlighting the moments in a film when the beauty of nature appears, that is, those moments when

42 *Ibid.*, § 65, 374.

43 Rohmer, 'V. Architecture d'apocalipse', p. 28. Originally: 'Cette notion d'ordre dont les philosophes ont fait le fondement de celle du Beau: ordre reposant sur l'uniformité, et non sur la diversité, ainsi que la nature nous l'enseigne.'

44 Louguet (ed.), *Rohmer ou le jeu des variations*, p. 96.

45 Rohmer, 'The Taste of Beauty', p. 77.

46 Rohmer, 'Renoir's Youth', p. 190.

cinema's potential is best used. Consequently, his reviews are replete with commendations of empirical beauties,[47] of the 'statuesque' attractiveness of the actors,[48] of the charm of a train crossing a forest,[49] of landscapes,[50] of the elegance of a dancing scene,[51] of the discrete appeal of a night walk on London's docks,[52] of the power of a wild horse chase[53] or of an arrow being shot.[54] In short, he often expressed his enthusiasm for fleeting fragments of photogenic beauty, for the apparitions of things whose beauty (that is, whose 'purposiveness without purpose') did not seem to be due to some artful plastic creator, and thus appeared 'natural' (in the Kantian sense).

Hence, his writing style focuses heavily on *details*, like 'this moment [in Buñuel's *Death in the Garden*] in which Michèle Girardon gets her long hair stuck in the forest lianas, when ants devour a grazed boa'[55] – and one of the reasons why he loved Hitchcock's cinema is that its bombastic overall implausibility highlighted by contrast the refreshing verisimilitude of sparse, barely noticeable details.[56] In fact, attention to detail notoriously characterizes not only Rohmer, but more broadly classic cinephilia:[57] in a letter to Rohmer (7 January 1951), François Truffaut affirmed that 'cinema is the art of the little detail that does not call attention to itself'[58] – a definition he would repeat almost verbatim two years later, in one of his first reviews for the *Cahiers du Cinéma* (*CC*).[59] This love for detail is clearly to be read alongside their hate for ellipses: whereas the latter conceal things from

47 One particularly blatant example is his 'La robe bleue d'Harriett'.
48 Rohmer, 'Arrêt d'autobus'.
49 Rohmer, 'Le brigand bien-aimé'.
50 Rohmer, 'Comme une fleur des champs'.
51 Rohmer, 'La belle de Moscou'.
52 Rohmer, 'Indiscret'.
53 Rohmer, 'Car sauvage est le vent'.
54 Rohmer, 'Le jugement des flèches'.
55 Rohmer, 'La mort en ce jardin'. Originally: 'celui [in Buñuel's *Death in the Garden*] où Michele Girardon prend aux lianes ses longs cheveux, où des fourmis dévorent un boa écorché.'
56 'It is the very implausibility of that matter that bestows upon the details of the texture a hint of truth which, in Hitchcock, pleases me at all times. [...] Hitchcock's art throws us into the implausible, only to eventually hold us thanks to an attention to the "true fact" that is so meticulous that the least event gets tinged with a second and more exact truth.' Originally: 'C'est l'invraisemblance même de la donnée qui donne aux détails de la facture cet accent de vérité qui, en Hitchcock, à tout moment me délecte. [...] L'art de Hitchcock est, nous jetant d'emblée dans l'invraisemblable, de nous retenir ensuite par une attention si précise au "fait vrai" que le moindre événement se teinte d'une séconde et plus exacte vérité.' Rohmer, 'Le soupçon', p. 65.
57 See especially Christian Keathley's remarkable book-length study on this topic: *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees*.
58 Truffaut, *Letters*, p. 35.
59 Truffaut, 'Dead Line (Bas les masques)'.

view in order to better suggest a mental concept and trigger the reader's imagination, the former is an *excess of visibility* to which no definite concept is attached.

Needless to say, the crux of the matter is once again appearance for appearance's sake, and not at all some alleged capability to 'faithfully' reproduce empirical reality. Cinema's strong bias towards natural beauty has nothing to do with the reproduction of trees, rivers and landscapes 'the way they are'. 'We are tempted to look at the world with our everyday eyes, to keep the tree, the running water, the face distorted with happiness or anguish, to keep them as they are, in spite of us.'[60] The key here is 'in spite of us': natural beauty is such because it appears *sourceless*, as the product of an artful agency and at the same time of *nobody's* agency. Hence the importance of details: things lying at the margin of what is going on are more likely to seem unstaged[61] (their being so or not is obviously beside the point).

Let us look into this argument in greater *detail*. As mentioned in the last chapter, cinema is *incompletely* oriented towards cognition and hence it has a strong aesthetic *potential*. 'Art does not reproduce reality, it *discovers* it, a bit like the scholar discovers his material. In both cases, these searches take us on roads far off the beaten path. That is why realism is not the enemy of style but, rather, is its best companion.'[62] The difference between this view and, say, Rudolf Arnheim's (for whom the aesthetic potential of cinema rested precisely upon that which separated it from reality – flatness, lack of colour, etc.) is that, for Rohmer, the aesthetic potential ensuing from the fact that cinema is an imperfect simulacrum of cognition *still* has much to do with its closeness to our ordinary perception of empirical reality (more on this later), precisely because, in a subtly Kantian vein, our ordinary perception of empirical reality is *itself by definition incomplete*, as it can never attain the noumenal dimension, but can only cling to phenomena.[63] Rohmer is not implying that cinema automatically produces natural beauty. He just

60 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 45.

61 In his *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes argued more or less the same thing about what he called the *punctum*; it is no surprise that Barthes' *punctum* plays a big part in Keathley's *Cinephilia and History*.

62 Rohmer, 'Faith and Mountains', p. 118.

63 This is to be read alongside the claim in Chapter 2, that cinema should stay clear of ellipses because in the cinema ellipses are everywhere: according to Rohmer, cinema reproduces man's ordinary vision, establishing a synthetic continuity whereby phenomena can appear – yet man's ordinary vision is *as such* faulty in the first place, in that it cannot but fail to take the noumenal dimension into account. The fact that omission (of the noumenal dimension) is the condition of possibility itself for *any* phenomena to emerge, heavily undermines the cinematic value of

says that cinema *can* exploit its being an imperfect simulacrum of cognition for the sake of aesthetics, *on the basis of* its closeness to human ordinary perception (which Rohmer never questions). 'It has often been said that the screen transfigures: on the contrary, I see the camera as a mechanical instrument able, at most, to bring out only the most sordid aspects of nature, that is, the flattest. Therefore the lyricism, whose dangers we might warn of elsewhere, appears here as the exclusive privilege of a few great works by those who are able to bring nature out of its shell.'[64] Some years later, Rohmer put the same idea in more recognizably Kantian terms:

> This would probably be the case, if the art of film were, on the whole, a pure recording technique. However, it goes without saying that the genius of an artist must oversee this machine's simple power of reproduction – a power for which, however, he should always have constant respect. And it is such respect, this moral and Kantian quality, that will enable him to go beyond appearances through the reproduction of appearance alone, and to paradoxically find the thing in itself within the phenomenon.[65]

'To find the thing in itself within the phenomenon' is an almost verbatim definition of Kant's beauty (and of Rohmer's 'appearance for appearance's sake').

As in the case of artistic beauty, it still takes a genius to put natural beauty on the screen. But the film director has the chance not only to be a genius (that is, to put together by means of the free play between imagination and understanding an object fully characterized by the internal coherence of its parts), but also to be *the missing genius*[66] implied in natural beauty

the ellipsis, a device which artfully selects *some* phenomena to be omitted so that other ones are imagined in the mind of the viewer.

64 Rohmer, 'The American Renoir', p. 177. '[The filmmaker's] difficulty is not, as we think, in creating a world of its own with mirrors – the tools at its disposal – but in managing simply to *copy* this natural beauty. But although it is true that the cinema manufactures nothing, it doesn't deliver things to us in a neat package either: it arouses this beauty, gives birth to it according to a *Socratic art* that constitutes the very basis of its method'. Rohmer, 'The Taste of Beauty', p. 77.

65 Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, p. 109. Originally: 'Ainsi en serait-il, sans doute, si l'art du film n'était en tout et pour tout, que technique d'enregistrement pur. Mais il va de soi que le génie de l'artiste doit prendre en charge le simple pouvoir de reproduction de la machine qu'il manie – pouvoir à l'égard duquel il devra toutefois observer un respect constant. Et c'est ce respect, qualité morale, qualité kantienne, qui lui permettra d'aller au-delà de l'apparence par la reproduction de la seule apparence, de trouver paradoxalement la chose en soi au sein du phénomène.'

66 In an interview, Claude Chabrol jokingly remarked that if Rohmer could, he would shoot a film with no camera whatsoever; in other words, his ideal cinema is one in which the artist

(what is presented to human eyes as a 'natural end', that is, as an end in itself that does not come from any definite agency). Artistic beauty is by definition inclined towards natural beauty, because both are after the same purposiveness without purpose; cinema enhances this inclination, because moving images appear to us as strikingly close to our ordinary perception of empirical reality. This closeness has nothing to do with any alleged correspondence between the images and reality. 'The screen is not *reality*, but it is even less a *painting*; it must be approached from a different angle';[67] this 'angle' (necessarily different from that of artistic beauty and its aesthetic ideas, as 'the screen is not a painting') is Kant's natural beauty, because moving images appear to us *as if nobody created them*. To put it in 'pre-conversion' Sartrean terms: in cinema, the non-positional, reflective, for-itself consciousness (accompanying the positional consciousness – the filmic capture – of some definite object) *indeed* is nothing (or nobody's). As André Bazin maintained regarding photographic realism, 'the solution is not to be found in the result achieved but in the way of achieving it':[68] thanks to the essentially automatic and mechanical process whereby moving images are produced, their unfolding *looks* 'unstaged', 'uncreated' and 'spontaneous' (regardless of any awareness, on the part of the viewer, that they were actually staged: what matters here is appearance and the illusion of reality it brings about). This is precisely what Kant's natural beauty is about: it materializes an aesthetic outcome, a self-sufficient organized whole, *minus the agency triggering final causality*. It is not only a purposiveness without purpose, but also a *seemingly sourceless* purposiveness without purpose. The watchmaker disappears, as it were, in the wheels of the watch.[69]

> The mechanical nature of the film medium, in other words, appears to answer the selfsame problem that motivated Kant's conception of the aesthetic, namely, the conundrum of finding a third term through

disappears completely (like Kant's God, the nowhere-to-be-found genius behind natural beauty). Stefano Francia di Celle, Enrico Ghezzi and Roberto Turigliatto (eds.), *L'oeil du malin*, p. 84.

67 Rohmer, 'Of Tastes and Colors', p. 69.

68 Bazin, 'Ontology of the Photographic Image', p. 12.

69 This is precisely what happens to Pablo Picasso in *The Mystery of Picasso* (*Le mystère Picasso*, Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1956), a documentary showing him at work. The painter here is less the one who imposes an overall vision on its matter, than a simple part of a broader unity: the painting itself as it unfolds in time, through the different stages of its development. In this respect, the painter is, as it were, engulfed within the autonomous temporal unfolding of the painting. 'What counts for our painter, who is a god in his universe, but a god only after the creation, is that a certain line be faithful, but the points of inflection are not known in advance'. Rohmer, 'Skimming Picasso', p. 134.

> which reason can ground itself in a meaningful (i.e. non-conceptual, non-tautological) manner. If, for Kant, fine art (mediated through the creative imagination of a genius) and aesthetic reflection (taste) pose the solution, would not a mechanical imagination and genius (that of the cinema) produce even more satisfactory results?[70]

Once again, this is not limited to beautiful trees, beautiful mountains, beautiful rivers and the like: natural elements are clearly privileged objects of cinema's attention, but even something as artificial as a piece of classical Hollywood storytelling can be deemed as 'natural' in this Kantian sense, provided that this impression of sourcelessness that cinema is capable of producing is maintained. This 'missing genius' enabled by cinema (which 'cures the artist of his fatal narcissism'[71]) is someone who makes beauty on the screen possible, while still being able to *conceal* the contribution required to make it possible.

> A slave of appearance, the filmmaker, taking the cue from what is real, can only suggest an endless profusion of latent metaphors. Still, this real should better be shown without tricks, or at least, since art cannot abstain from cheating to some degree, the filmmaker should be able to erase his presence, with all the modesty needed to make what he shows shine with all those natural fires.[72]

Such a concealment is made possible by cinema's sourceless, mechanical imagination, showing us the way we experience things in ordinary, everyday reality, without cognitive purpose, and thus liable to a different purposiveness, in the guise of 'an endless profusion of latent metaphors.'

4.3. Immediate mediation

One can never insist too much that the strong bond between cinema and nature Rohmer has always maintained has nothing do with cinema's alleged capacity to 'faithfully reproduce reality'. Cinema does not ensure a 'faithful

70 Szaloky, 'Making New Sense of Film Theory Through Kant', p. 45.

71 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 45.

72 Rohmer, 'Huston et Bresson', p. 117. Originally: 'Le cinéaste, esclave de l'apparence, ne peut que suggérer, à partir du vrai, un infini de métaphores latentes. Encore convient-il que ce vrai soit montré sans ruses, ou, du moins, puisque l'art ne peut se passer de quelque tricherie, que le cinéaste sache s'effacer avec la modestie requise pour faire briller ce qu'il montre de tous ces feux naturels.'

reproduction of nature', nor is it a 'natural reproduction' of any kind. The word 'nature', here, should be read in a Kantian vein. Nature, for Kant, is 'the sum of appearances insofar as, by virtue of an internal principle of causality, they are in thoroughgoing coherence.'[73] Nature is the overall coherence whereby appearances are produced; it stands for the fact that all that appears to us appears to be submitted to the mechanical laws *of cause and effect*. Thereby (and thanks to the necessary contribution of the understanding, factually guaranteeing this unity), appearances appear to us qua globally submitted to a substantial order and regularity. Godard: 'The natural order corresponds to that of the heart and mind.'[74]

It can be argued that, by insisting so much on the strong bond between cinema and nature in his writings, Rohmer basically wanted to assert that an ordinary, average, shared way to perceive empirical reality in our everyday experience *exists*, and that cinema can reproduce it for aesthetic (as opposed to cognitive) purposes. In other words, cinema is in touch with nature not because it can faithfully reproduce empirical reality, but because it can reproduce the order and regularity whereby appearances are engendered and presented to our consciousness, and whereby we experience things in our everyday life; not because moving images can deliver the perfect reproduction of a stone in motion, but because it can show that, once that a stone is cast, it falls on the ground following the laws of gravity, after hitting one or more objects possibly standing in the way. This 'ordinary vision' (whose affinity with cinema Rohmer never questions: it is a sort of *axiom* he never feels the urge of demonstrating) is *everybody's* and hence *nobody's*, like cinema's mechanical sourcelessness whereby moving images can have access to natural beauty like no other art.

When one reads a passage like 'Such vanity is painting, which has given up telling the world to exist according to its laws. But the truth is that things are as they are, regardless of how we see them,'[75] one might be led to think that to Rohmer cinema's specificity lies in reproducing 'things as they are.' This is not the case though. Here is what the critic writes only a few lines ahead:

> With the discovery of perspective, we realized the respective dimensions that objects registered on our retinas. We then learned that lines did not exist and that everything lay in the interplay of darkness and light, for

73 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B446.
74 Godard, 'What is Cinema?', p. 31.
75 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 44.

> light itself was colour, and that even the simplest colour was merely the juxtaposition of several tones. Did our vision change? [...] If Raphael had not existed, we would have the right to call cubism folly or scribbling. *Guernica* does not detract from the *Belle jardinière*, or vice versa, but I don't think it too daring to say that one of these works has been, and always will be, more in conformity with our ordinary vision of object.[76]

In a way, Rohmer is not saying anything different here from 'things are as they are, regardless of how we see them.' At the same time, he is highlighting *one* in particular among these 'things' being as they are, regardless of how we see them. This 'thing' is *the very way things appear to us*. We cannot help but seeing things in a certain way. So, before empirical reality comes into play at all, if 'reality' is to be meant as 'that which remains the same regardless of our intentions and biases,' the reality we must face is *our own vision*, qua always already conditioned by a priori schemes. This is an unmistakably Kantian point, although part of the argument ('that lines did not exist and that everything lay in the interplay of darkness and light, for light itself was colour, and that even the simplest colour was merely the juxtaposition of several tones') is unambiguously taken from Goethe's *Theory of Colours*. What the above passage clearly suggests is not only that man experiences things according to a certain ('transcendental', in Kant's words) mediation, but also that we are *objectively* bound to a mediation of a specific kind: that which makes us see things *according to a synthetic principle of unity*. Rohmer often insists on the *necessity* of that mediation: he only means that cinema's mediation is ruled by approximately the same kind of order and regularity (that of mechanical laws of causality) ruling our ordinary perceptions in everyday empirical reality.

Thus, cinema's transparency, the way Rohmer conceives it, has nothing to do with sheer immediacy ('in some indirect way, the camera will always proclaim its existence'[77]), but with a sort of *immediate mediation*; as Melinda Szaloky put it, '[k]eeping in mind that the Kantian aesthetic strives to render transparent what is usually only mediated – including, and primarily, conceptual mediation itself – will help explain the fascination of a medium (film) that appears as an embodiment, as a mechanical re-enactment, of mediation itself.'[78] For Rohmer, 'nature' simply stands for this immediate mediation, for 'our ordinary vision of things.' This is apparent, for instance,

76 *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.
77 Rohmer, 'Renoir's Youth', p. 189.
78 Szaloky, 'Making New Sense of Film Theory Through Kant', p. 40.

when the critic writes that Murnau 'reveals the harmony of nature, its essential unity,'[79] and immediately after adds that cinema 'can still portray us *as we see ourselves*,'[80] thereby implying that the unity of nature does not concern the way nature is 'in itself,' but as *we* see it (that is, as necessarily unified by means of our understanding).

However, this formulation is still incomplete, and too easily lends itself to substantial misunderstandings. To say that cinema is strictly related to nature insofar as it embodies the immediate mediation whereby we normally experience phenomena in everyday reality, could possibly suggest the misleading idea that the point of Rohmer's analogy lies entirely in the relationship between cinema, reality and the way the latter ordinarily appear to us. This is not the case though, for such a view is ultimately not Kantian. It is not Kantian, because it takes into account only one limited part of the overall framework. In Kant's system, beauty and *freedom* go together. Cinema qua 'art of nature' means that cinema can stick to our ordinary vision of reality, i.e. (as per Kant), reality qua globally submitted *to the necessity of mechanical laws* (of causality). Yet, one should not overlook the fact that if cinema were nothing but the reproduction of mechanical laws of nature, Rohmer's view of cinema would not be Kantian at all. In Kant, mechanical necessity *is only the background for man to break it* (or, more precisely, for man to *be* its disruption). It follows that cinema's adherence to nature, viz. to our ordinary vision and to the necessity of mechanical laws of causality *is not the point* of cinema, but only the necessary background so that beauty and freedom can emerge. Beauty, as we have seen in the previous pages, emerges when the necessity of mechanical laws is 'twisted' into a purposiveness without purpose. As for freedom, it can only emerge *through narrative*, i.e. through a texture of causes and effects providing the occasion for its own disruption. An overtly traditionalist film critic, Rohmer declared that, for him, cinema was primarily *narrative* cinema. Rohmer never believed 'that documentaries are superior. Quite the contrary: I think, as did Bazin, that fiction has always been, and will be, cinema's preferred route and that the most beautiful documentaries, such as Flaherty's, are able to allow some – if not anecdotes – at least drama.'[81] 'An art of nature' can only mean 'a narrative art', because 'nature' (in a Kantian vein) means 'our ordinary

79 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 52.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

81 Rohmer, 'Faith and Mountains', p. 116. In 'Hommes et loups', the critic rejects *The Wolves* (*Uomini e Lupi*), a 1956 fiction film by Giuseppe de Santis, because (unlike Flaherty) it fails to fluidly integrate 'pure' documentary footage (of wolf hunt) with drama, thus making it look fake even if the footage is real and unstaged.

vision of things qua submitted to the mechanical laws of causality,' and narrative is just the best way to have causality unfurled so that freedom can break through it. 'What does the storyline matter, one will say! I am not at all convinced but I am persuaded, to the contrary, that the libretto is as important as the music, here as in Mozart's operas.'[82] Already in the *Gazette du cinéma* years, Godard was adamant that 'One sees that, contrary to current belief, there cannot be good direction without a good script,'[83] while Rivette more subtly identified cinema with narrative *insofar as* the latter makes its own negation possible: 'Cinema is a dramatic art: therein, universe is organised according to clashing forces; all is duel and conflict; probably, though, it finds an accomplishment in its own negation, that is, in contemplation.'[84]

4.4. Movement and narrative

This point is crucial and so it is worth exploring it further. For one thing, Rohmer makes it very clear that cinema can come significantly close to ordinary perception precisely because images *move*.

> I have now arrived at the paradox that a means of mechanical reproduction like photography is generally excluded from art, not because it can only reproduce, but precisely because it distorts even more than a pencil or a paintbrush does. In a family album's snapshot, what is left of a face but an unexpected grimace that is not the real face? By freezing what is mobile, the film betrays everything, right down to resemblances.[85]

The importance of movement in Rohmer's conception of cinema cannot be overestimated. For him, it is indeed the primary element of cinema, around which everything revolves. It is movement that enables cinema to engender beauty out of a necessarily imperfect reproduction of nature. 'Where is the art, one might say, if nature appears as is? But in film, everything is in a state of becoming. A face matters little until it relaxes or wrinkles following its internal rhythm. Leaves matter little, until they create beauty by rustling.

82 Rohmer, 'The Quintessence of the Genre: Cukor', p. 154.
83 Godard, '*No Sad Songs For Me*', p. 21.
84 Rivette, 'Les malheurs d'Orphée', pp. 1-2. Originally: 'Le cinéma est art dramatique: l'univers s'y organise suivant des forces qui s'affrontent; tout y est duel est conflit; mais sans doute trouve-t-il son accomplissement dans sa propre négation: dans la contemplation.'
85 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 45.

Film works with movement, the only domain in which it must abstract and reconstruct.'[86]

This last sentence, crucially, attests to the fact that Rohmer's emphasis on movement did not depend on an alleged correspondence between cinematic motion and some actual empirical motion the camera would realistically seize 'out there'. Cinema *abstracts* motion and *reconstructs* it. A self-proclaimed Aristotelian, who often insisted on his reliance on the teachings of the Greek philosopher, Rohmer could not ignore that his turn of phrase closely echoed *mimesis* the very way Aristotle defined it in his *Poetics*: whilst nature rests upon an immanent movement whereby its potential is smoothly actualized through time, storytelling (that is, tragedy) is the imitation of nature whereby men *abstract* the original immanence of movement in nature and *reconstruct* a fictional movement by means of a narrative concatenation of causes and effects.

But before tackling what Rohmer regards as cinema's inherent narrativity, it is worth expending a few words on his unquestionable awareness that *even regardless of narrative*, cinema does not reproduce movement 'the way it is', but abstracts and reconstructs it. Rohmer never forgets that the movement we see onscreen is only illusory; his writings are not short of references to this basic feature of cinematic movement, for instance when he praised Frank Tashlin because of the way he interweaves stillness with movement.

> Instead of presenting it [movement] at a single stretch, however, he presents it as a passage from one immobile state to another, thus restoring, in an entirely modern way, the discontinuous nature that it had when silent films were young. This discontinuity is perhaps secretly due – as it is not directly perceived by the spectator – to the film's undergoing twenty-four pauses per second.[87]

Rohmer is perfectly aware that 'it is false to compare the camera with a perfect recording box,' because splitting each second into 24 frames is already a major distortion, so 'the secret of the art of the great choreographers and dancers of the screen may be that they instinctively perceive the discontinuous nature of cinematic reproduction and always instinctively bend the norms of their movements in accordance with it.'[88] Moreover, while in 1954 the critic had been taken aback by the fact that somebody considered

86 Rohmer, 'Reflections on Colour', p. 40.
87 Rohmer, 'The Art of Caricature: Tashlin', p. 151.
88 Rohmer, 'The Quintessence of the Genre: Cukor', p. 153.

animation cinema as one of cinema's most specific outcomes,[89] in 1958 he finally agreed with *CC* film critic André Martin (arguably the 'somebody' he was thinking of four years earlier) that 'the cinema of live action is an animation cinema without knowing it.'[90] The movement we see on the screen is not the reproduction of the movement we can see in empirical reality: it is a movement *the camera* makes up.

It follows that the importance of movement to Rohmer had little to do with a naïve belief in the exactness of cinematic reproduction. Rather, his point is once again Kantian. The 'unity of nature' is ensured by the understanding applying its categories to phenomena (thereby unifying them under a single broad kind of coherence). Causality is one of these categories. Thus, understanding arranges phenomena so that they are presented to us as ideally unfolding according to a necessary, objective succession following the laws of cause and effect. Through this necessary, objective succession, a continuous change is deployed: 'all change is possible only through a continuous action of the causality.'[91] *Motion* is that by which change from A to B occurs in a continuous way.

We have seen in a previous chapter that cinema's externalized imagination synthesizes the manifold of appearance, thereby predisposing a series (of shots, scenes, etc.) to be unfolded through the irreversible time of the projection. Once this series is projected, understanding, in the wake of that temporal irreversibility, arranges it into a necessary, objective succession following the laws of causality. This applies not only to the phenomena being shown in the images in general, but also and in particular to *motion*: exactly in the same fashion, cinema's externalized imagination synthesizes a succession of frames so that the understanding, upon projection, can acknowledge them as a single flow and take them for actual motion. In other words, cinema's externalized imagination synthesizes the manifold of appearance, predisposing a succession to be unfolded in irreversible time (as well as an illusory movement) upon projection, so as to trigger the understanding into bestowing an objective, necessary succession following the laws of causality, as well as into acknowledging actual motion out of the illusory one brought forth by the succession of frames – in short, into bestowing to the succession synthesized by cinema's externalized imagination the *unity of nature* (along with the unity of consciousness/experience/apperception), viz. the order and regularity whereby appearances normally

89 Rohmer, 'Livres de cinéma: *L'amour du cinéma* de Claude Mauriac', p. 57.
90 Rohmer, 'The Quintessence of the Genre: Cukor', p. 154.
91 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B254.

appear to us, that is, qua globally submitted to mechanical laws of causality, which cannot but be deployed *through movement*. 'A face doesn't look right if one doesn't feel all of space weigh on each wrinkle. What would a burst of laughter or anxious twitching signify if they did not find their visible echo in the universe?'[92] By bestowing the movement animating a burst of laughter on the screen, understanding finds in it 'all of space', 'a visible echo in the universe', because that bestowal is the bestowal of the unity of nature, viz. of the general coherence underlying the way things normally appear to us.

It follows that Rohmer's emphasis on movement is to be thought of alongside his conviction that cinema is primarily narrative: both are part of the same Kantian knot that ties together movement,[93] necessary and objective succession, continuous change and causality, i.e. all that falls under the kind of order and regularity (the unity of nature) that understanding is normally bound to bestow upon phenomena, *particularly* when pushed to do so by cinema's externalized imagination, synthesizing the manifold of appearance in such a way as to greatly foster the understanding's customary bestowal of this order and regularity (that is, of movement, necessary and objective succession, continuous change, causality, and so on). The problem with photography, in the above quotation, is not that it does not 'copy' movement as it can be seen in empirical reality, but that it is not enough to push the understanding to do what it usually does, namely to confer the unity of nature (and all that ensues) to the images.

Heidegger asked the following:

> Kant says that 'transcendental appearance', to which traditional metaphysics owes its possibility, is necessary. Must not this transcendental untruth be positively established in its original unity with transcendental truth on the basis of the intrinsic essence of the finitude in *Dasein*? Does not the dis-essence [*Unwesen*] of this appearance pertain to the essence of finitude?[94]

According to Rohmer, cinema is a resounding 'no' to this question. It indeed embodies a 'transcendental appearance' (a 'transcendental untruth'), but its necessity has nothing to do with the human, contingent, 'novelistic'

92 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 49.

93 Phrasings such as 'Stability and perpetual movement are just violations of nature. The most realistic art is naively unaware of them' ('Such Vanity is Painting', p. 46) quite closely echo Kant's own ideas on motion, including early ones, like those outlined in his 1758 *New Theory of Motion and Rest*.

94 Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 254.

temporalization of *Dasein*. On the contrary, the necessity behind (human *and* cinematic) transcendental appearance is still the old Kantian one: mechanism. Cinema's externalized imagination synthesizes the manifold of appearances so that an irreversible (thereby *not contingent*) order is created; thanks to this irreversibility, the understanding unifies the images (not least by bestowing movement) in accordance with the unity of nature, viz. by deeming that succession as necessary, and by endowing them with reciprocal, necessary connections according to the mechanical laws of causality.

To a certain degree, Rohmer follows the German philosopher also in respect of the latter's emphasis on the continuity of change: if cinema is the art of nature, then it must be the art of mechanical, necessary, causal connections, then it must be the art of movement, then it must be the art of continuity, in that change from A to B through movement occurs in a continuous way between A and B. As pointed out earlier, it is not difficult to figure out why he rejected ellipsis: a strictly temporal, narrative device of a quintessentially literary kind, it enacts a disruption in the story's timeline so as to trigger the reader/viewer's imagination – the latter to be intended 'à la Sartre', that is, aside from perception. Conversely, he aligns cinema with continuity, in that (as we saw in Chapter two) cinematic continuity marks the *omnipresence* of ellipses *and* of their own automatic bridging thanks to the irreversible time of projection. Thereby, perception and imagination regain their original, 'Kantian' connection – and not only because viewers perceive cinema's 'externalized imagination' at work. In front of the screen, the viewers' imagination bridges the gaps at *every* moment perception is operative, and not just when it is called to do so aside from perception by a discernible disruption in the timeline of a story. If one accepts the Kantian framework, then the same thing applies at the other end of the Rohmerian analogy between cinema and ordinary perception, in that according to that framework man's ordinary vision is deemed to be *inherently* elliptical: the synthetic principle of unity brought forth by the imagination and enabling perception cannot but leave the noumenal dimension aside in the first place. The noumenal dimension is nothing but the gaps rendering the texture of Being inherently inconsistent; imagination is precisely that which 'sacrifices' and gives up these gaps *by filling them in* at every moment in which perception is operative in order for reality to be intelligible at all. Hence Rohmer's analogy: perception can only work by letting imagination carry out a synthesis which cannot but leave the noumenal unaccounted for.

As a result, in contrast with literature intended as a time-based kind of storytelling essentially relying on indirect allusion and subjective temporal manipulation (typically, ellipses), for him cinema was a space-based kind of

storytelling primarily relying on continuity, viz. on a continuous spatialization of and over time. As late as 1959, for instance, he complained about the excessive cutting in Henry Hathaway's *From Hell to Texas* (1958), allegedly breaking the spell of continuity in a film whose charm over the spectator was chiefly due to the exact, integral rendering of the settings.[95]

However, we must be careful not to misunderstand this continuity bias. An observant Kantian, Rohmer is well aware of the distinction between *descriptive* and *prescriptive*. He maintains that cinema is de facto to be identified with continuity, but this does not mean that continuity should be pursued at all costs. He never argues that a filmmaker should, say, use editing as little as possible and opt instead for as many long takes as he can – and when he does argue this, like in his early effort about *The Rope* mentioned in the previous chapter, he is unconvincing. 'It is [...][96] spatial continuity that matters most to me. Certain poor bits of sequential cutting break it up while some of the most fragmented cuts can still preserve it. I am not aware that montage effects are henceforth to be condemned.'[97] Since causal connections and movement are posited by understanding, continuity as well is the task of understanding; it follows that it does not matter whether spatial continuity is formally created in the filmic space by means of unedited long takes or not. What matters is that, one way or another, understanding posits that continuity. It should be noted that Rohmer distinguished editing from not only continuity, but also *discontinuity*: a camera movement, a gaze, a gesture or even a word can engender a discontinuity in the cinematic flow much more than an editing cut.[98] Clearly, he conceives continuity in purely virtual terms (only the spectator's understanding delivers it), not in technical/formal ones. Classical cinema's 'continuity editing', for instance, puts together a virtual continuity to be considered by all means as continuity, according to the critic.

In sum, Rohmer's 'continuity bias' is thus a sort of 'Kantian Conditioned Reflex' never really turning into a prescription, a formula to create cinematic works the way they should allegedly be made. The critic simply acknowledges that cinema's original, essential vocation is continuity (as opposed to the discontinuity of ellipses, that quintessentially temporal and literary device), and filmmakers should stick to it as much as they can; yet, he never felt the

95 Rohmer, 'La fureur des hommes'.

96 Liz Heron, the translator of this article, adds here a 'their' that is not to be found in the original text.

97 Rohmer, 'The Cardinal Virtues of Cinemascope', p. 281.

98 See, for instance, Rohmer, 'Livres de cinéma', *CC*, 59 (May 1956), p. 54.

need to lay down (or theorize) any steadfast laws prescribing how to achieve this. Rather, his 'continuity bias' should be read alongside his *narrative* bias. If cinema is the art of nature, then it must be the art of mechanical, necessary, causal connections, then it must be the art of (continuous) movement, *then it must be primarily a narrative art*. This bias originates from Astruc too. 'Cinéma et dialectique', the companion piece of 'Dialectique et cinéma', extends the equivalence of the other article (cinema = movement = dialectic) to narrative: cinema synthesizes an orderly, oriented succession creating connections that tend to automatically have the character of necessity, simply because movement presents them as following an irrefutable succession; cinema is thus inherently narrative, because its movement cannot but engender a system of connections. 'A film is an argument. It is so, because it is a tale, and because every tale is a demonstration. The movement whereby it is animated gives it its meaning. Because it belongs to the framework of time, it ipso facto belongs to the framework of dialectics.'[99] Narrative is the deployment of a thick texture of causes and effects; since causality is one of the categories of the understanding, and since cinema is an external embodiment of imagination, producing a synthesis that nevertheless only the joint action of sensibility and understanding (that is, only through somebody's consciousness experiencing it) can enable, the overlapping between narrative (a system of causes and effects) and the flow of images resulting from the synthesis of the manifold of appearances can only be all too smooth.[100]

99 Originally: 'Un film est un raisonnement. Il l'est parce qu'il est un récit, et que tout récit est une démonstration. Le mouvement qui l'anime lui donne sa signification. Rentrant dans le cadre du temps, il rentre du même coup dans ceux de la dialectique'. Astruc, 'Cinéma et dialectique,' p. 340.

100 In his *Film and Phenomenology*, Allan Casebier devised a Husserlian theory of film, according to which film is, as it were, inherently narrative, although it is perfectly possible that non-narrative films exist. His argument can be sketchily summarized as follows. For Husserl, when we perceive an object we also acknowledge that our perception does not coincide with the perceived object, and by the same token we imply that there is a part of the object that is beyond our reach, and that can be approached though by means of the piecemeal assembly of the different parts of the object. Casebier argues that cinematic fiction works in a similar way: once we recognize something in a film as part of a larger narrative, we immediately imply the existence of a piece of fiction to be regarded as an actual object in its own terms, viz. as something to be gradually *discovered* by the spectator as the latter replaces expectations on 'what's next' with whatever actually happens on the screen. In this way, the spectator apprehends cinematic fiction like regular objects of perception, i.e. as something external and apart ('transcendent'); if, on the one hand, it is grasped only by stitching together cues that follow one another in time, on the other hand the stitchery itself *is driven by the way the object* (*that is, that particular piece of fiction*) *is shaped in the first place*. If one were to bring this phenomenological theory of film back to Husserl's Kantian sources, the outcome would not be too removed from Rohmer's conception

However, it is also natural that *a substantial contrast* between narrative and the flow of images emerges, between images qua images and images qua the mere support of an unfolding story, precisely because they belong to faculties (imagination and understanding) which in the ordinary course of transcendental aesthetics work together, but which in the case of cinema are peculiarly disjointed. This discord will play a major role in the next chapter.

4.5. Mechanism as the background for freedom

While summarizing what has been said so far, it is useful to enlarge the frame. The answer to the question 'what changed after Rohmer's conversion?' should morph into 'what is the Copernican revolution Rohmer brought about, and how did it influence the éS (and by extension the pda)?'

Rohmer posited a substantial affinity between cinema and the unity of nature, viz. our ordinary vision of things in everyday empirical reality. This does not only and exclusively mean that moving images on the screen 'look like empirical reality'. Rohmer, quite outspokenly, believed so (despite never bothering to prove it), but this is only part of his point, and arguably not at all the most relevant one. His point is chiefly *formal*. The reason why cinema is so capable of matching the unity of nature is that its images, thanks to the interaction between its photographic basis and the synthesis of motion (in which cinema's externalized imagination plays indeed a crucial role by predisposing an immobile sequence that only the understanding, as a consequence of the actual screening, can recognize as a flow), offer a simulacrum of *the overall coherence whereby phenomena appear to us*, that is, qua submitted to the mechanical laws of causality and to the ensuing necessary, objective successive connections. Hence the importance of movement and narrative, both qualifying what cinema is primarily about.

In short, Rohmer associated cinema with Kant's *mechanism*. But this must also mean that he also associated it with the two flip sides of mechanism:

of cinematic narrative, imposing on the viewer the inherent necessity of its unfolding. All the more so if we consider that Casebier contrasted his own realist theory with what he called the 'idealist/nominalist' framework, encompassing among others Jean-Louis Baudry, Noël Burch, David Bordwell and most other film scholars in general. According to that framework, says Casebier, a film is not an object, but a system of *signs*, viz. a text whose construction is not given once and for all but rather something whose consistency, meaning etc. must be at every moment negotiated with the spectator receiving it. Casebier's divide between object-driven and sign-driven conceptions of the way films work is clearly in accordance with Rohmer's, between 'ontology' and 'language'.

beauty and freedom. Otherwise, his perspective would simply not be Kantian. To associate cinema with mechanism, with the objective (for understanding) unfolding of causal connections, can be seen as the Copernican revolution having given birth to the éS/pda, because it freed cinema of the Sartrean bias envisaging it as basically a visual novel. What was particularly important was the detachment of cinema from the novelistic primacy of the reflective (for-itself), contingent, temporalizing consciousness. Following Rohmer and the crucial 'Dialectique et cinéma' article, cinema was now thought to depend on a temporal succession (of frames, shots, scenes, etc.) which, even before understanding could form an objective succession based on necessary, mechanical casual relationships, bore an a priori character of necessity thanks to the mechanical irreversibility produced by cinema's externalized imagination. Put differently, cinema was now ascribed to a temporalization marked by necessity, rather than by the contingency of for-itself consciousness; this amounted to saying that films followed a deceptive ('dialectical', as per Astruc's definition) temporal logic *of their own*, that was *not* the contingent, arbitrary temporalization of human consciousness. One had to follow that autonomous, mechanical, 'inhuman' temporal logic (which can simply be called the logic of narrative *action*) as it unfolded through the film, until its inevitable inconsistencies emerged. Thereby, precisely at those moments, *freedom* also emerged. Freedom was now a necessary accident of mechanism – not the groundless condemnation of a for-itself consciousness 'condemned to be free'.

It can thus be argued that, according to Rohmer, cinema's externalized imagination, along with the detachment between the imagination and the understanding that it entails, is indeed the key to what he seemingly regards as cinema's inherent Kantism. That detachment makes cinema incomparably suited to delivering *both* beauty *and* freedom through moving images, beauty famously being for Kant an indirect symbol of morality (which the philosopher always links with freedom as moral autonomy). This is because beauty appears when imagination and understanding engage in a *free play* – a possibility that cinema, which relies precisely on their radical disjointedness, can only enhance. Again, 'free play' here means that understanding is unable to apply causality to that which is presented by the imagination; hence, it is essentially a matter of eschewing causality, viz. of freedom in the most genuine moral sense (and crucially, this 'collapse of mechanism' too is due to a selfsame detachment between the imagination and understanding). So, when the sensual beauty Rohmer so often insists upon graces the screen, it is causality that has fallen apart somehow – it is a straightforward matter of freedom as well, viz. a matter of morality.

Thus, ethics and aesthetics, as per Kant, turn out to be inseparable. This is why our account must now promptly grapple with the *ethical* side of Rohmer's film criticism and aesthetics.

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Abbreviations

CC = *Cahiers du Cinéma*
éS = *école Schérer*
GoG = Tom Milne (ed. and trans.), *Godard on Godard*. London and New York: Da Capo, 1972.
pda = *politique des auteurs*
ToB = Jean Narboni and Eric Rohmer (eds.), *The Taste of Beauty*, trans. by Carol Volk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

5. Ethics at the Heart of Aesthetics

Grosoli, Marco, *Eric Rohmer's Film Theory (1948-1953). From 'école Schérer' to 'Politique des auteurs'*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

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Abstract
From Truffaut's 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema' (1954) to Rivette's 'On Abjection' (1961), the inseparability of ethics and aesthetics has been a key assumption of the *politique des auteurs* from the outset. This chapter aims to demonstrate that even before the *politique* existed, Eric Rohmer decisively laid the basis for the eventual affirmation of this inseparability. To this end, it traces the conceptual constellation (adumbrated in many of his film reviews) underlying Rohmer's view of cinematic ethics and aesthetics, including his reaction against Sartre's *mauvaise foi*, the notion of *solitude morale*, Kant's practical reason, and, finally, his conviction that cinema should draw inspiration from classical tragedy.

Keywords: Rohmer, ethics, moral, tragedy

5.1. On abjection: The Wages of Fear

Our account of how the *école Schérer* (éS) conceived of ethics and freedom in relation to cinema should probably begin with a description of what Rohmer and his friends considered an exemplary token of moral abjection: *The Wages of Fear* (*Le salaire de la peur*, 1953) by Henri-Georges Clouzot.

The film is about a group of European men in a village in southern Mexico; for various reasons, all their lives are at an impasse, and they are all stuck there, unable to go anywhere else and put their lives together again. Suddenly, a huge load of nitroglycerin needs to be transported on two trucks to an oil field nearby. The lost men are hired for this extremely dangerous (given the terrible conditions of the roads in the area) task. They all accept the money, which would allow them to get on their feet again. Three of them die in the course of the perilous drive. Mario, the only one standing, after having hitherto outlived unspeakable dangers, and after having successfully delivered the load to the oil field, dies in the stupidest possible way, in a

sudden accident on his way back, on his now empty truck. A moment before, parallel editing showed him and Linda (the woman who was waiting for him back at the village), each dancing alone to the same tune (the 'Blue Danube'), one at his steering wheel, the other in a bar.

In his *Cahiers du Cinéma* (*CC*) review, Pierre Kast welcomed the film as a perfect dramatic machine. The initial situation is carefully outlined during an unusually long introductory part, followed by action proper, composed of a faultless concatenation of causes and effects wholly ensuing from the initial situation. Moreover, *The Wages of Fear* displays a wealth of powerful effects on the viewer: it is extremely rich in meticulously calculated suspense, and it painstakingly orchestrates the emotions the audience is expected to receive. Clearly, Kast here (implicitly) relies on the very traditional narrative/narration couple that was already recalled in Chapter one. The film, in the critic's view, is a perfect dramatic machine because it manages to integrate narrative and narration: even the final scene, disrupting the otherwise faultless texture of causes and effects with a bombastic, sudden and completely unmotivated emotional effect (the accident), *keeps narrative coherence intact*, because the patent absurdity of that accident is perfectly justified by the premises outlined in the long first part of *The Wages of Fear*, showing that the characters are fundamentally the prisoners of the situations wherein they are confined, and whereby they are determined and limited. Here, Sartre comes once again into play.

> The expository method of *The Wages of Fear* corresponds as exactly as possible, in a cinematic context, to Sartre's views on the novel, or on the dramatic action. The characters are caught within their own worldly situation. Be it conscious or unconscious, their refusal to mind their own condition, their blindness, their naïve faith in their deceptive strengths, necessarily throw them into catastrophe.[1]

The Wages of Fear is 'a drama of failure, [...] a tragedy of the absurdity of blind undertakings. What is at stake is not vanity-in-itself, action-in-itself, but rather a failure that is strictly bound to a definite human context.'[2] For

1 Kast, 'Un grand film athée', pp. 52-53. Originally: 'La méthode d'exposition du *Salaire de la peur* est la correspondance exacte, au cinéma, des vues de Sartre sur le roman, ou l'action dramatique. Les personnages sont pris dans la nasse de leur situation dans le monde. Le refus conscient ou inconscient d'assumer leur condition, l'aveuglement, la croyance naïve en leur forces illusoires, les précipitent nécessairement à la catastrophe.'

2 Kast, 'Un grand film athée', p. 53. Originally: 'Un drame de l'échec, [...] une tragédie de l'absurdité des entreprises aveugles. Il ne s'agit pas de vanité-en-soi, de l'action-en-soi, mais

Sartre, human freedom is groundless, and man can only make sense of its groundlessness when it is rooted in a definite *situation*. Nevertheless, even within a situation, its groundlessness does not disappear: man is perpetually threatened by the absurdity of his own condition, i.e. by the groundlessness of his own freedom. The main characters of Clouzot's film refuse to acknowledge their belonging to the situation they belong to, and only try to blindly get away from it. As a result, they only bang against the absurdity of destiny, of human condition. The film, on the contrary, sticks to situation, to a strict deployment of causes and effects (which is why it is, in Kast's own words, a great atheist film). When Mario takes one corner too fast and plunges through the guardrail to his death in his empty truck, the story seemingly admits to a patent infringement of narrative coherence, but, in fact, it just confirms its initial premises: outside a definite situation, there can only be absurdity and groundlessness. It's the situation-oriented logic of the story against the 'escapist' logic of the character (who wishes to transcend and nihilate a situation by blinding himself to it and clinging to an abstract, airy-fairy hope of redemption): the former breaks down causality only to confirm its superiority over the latter. Such a move is obviously to be ascribed to 'narration' rather than to 'narrative' (as highlighted by the very deliberate use of parallel editing), but is also the ultimate confirmation that one supports the other: a gratuitous effect on the viewer compels the latter to acknowledge that 'this ending was inseparable from the exposition of the motives,'[3] and delivers what the merely causal concatenation cannot. The same goes for the use of suspense throughout the film. Precisely because the characters are unambiguously presented as miserable, unpleasant, debased, totally prey to their own appetites and therefore entirely 'swallowed' by the cause-effect texture of narrative ('they don't have any free, immortal soul escaping their narrowly delimited condition'[4]) the viewer's involvement has to be conquered in some other non-strictly-narrative way, namely through suspense (narration, 'whatever effect, provided that it works'[5]).

Crucially, Kast takes great pains to circumscribe *a meaning* to the film. 'But the plenitude and the beauty of the film's form can be so immediately seen, and even its enemies would so easily admit that it's there, that at this

d'un échec étroitement lié à un contexte humain précis.'

3 *Ibid*. Originally: 'Cette fin était inséparable de l'exposé des motifs.'

4 Kast, 'Un grand film athée', p. 54. Originally: 'Ils n'ont pas une âme immortelle, libre et dispose, hors de leur condition, qui a été étroitement définie.'

5 *Ibid*. Originally: 'N'importe quel effet pourvu qu'il fonctionne.'

point it is worth jumping very quickly to the meaning of what is shown';[6] 'However, I think that the meaning of the film is far more important than its place in contemporary cinema';[7] 'In *The Wages of Fear*, Clouzot seemingly wants the audience to understand what, in his previous works, was only latent.'[8] It thus seems safe to argue that Clouzot's film is a 'perfect dramatic machine' in that narrative and narration, each at its own place, work together so that *the meaning* behind the narrative (roughly: outside a situation there is only absurdity and groundlessness) can emerge. Sometimes, the stability of cause-effect narrative texture recedes (the finale), sometimes narration does (the first hour almost entirely exposes the characters, almost without effects), but their cooperation and mutual support fosters the legibility of that meaning. It is the absolute triumph of causal determinism: even when narrative's cause-effect texture breaks down, it is for the sake of the overall meaning of the film, affirming that one cannot escape the situation whereby one is determined.

Another way to explain Kast's claim that *The Wages of Fear* 'corresponds as exactly as possible, in a cinematic context, to Sartre's views on the novel, or on the dramatic action,' is by referring to Sartre's conceptualization of *bad faith*. In order to introduce this concept, it is necessary to clarify what *facticity* and *transcendence* are. Transcendence is, as we have already seen, nihilation, freedom, the 'unhooking' from the causal texture, the reflection whereby the for-itself consciousness comes into being. Facticity is the residual contingency the for-itself consciousness remains attached to despite its nihilation: it is the umbilical cord connecting it to the pre-reflective realm of the in-itself, blindly submitted to causality-wise interactions. It is for-itself consciousness qua situated in the world and part of its being 'out there'; it is the 'first person' that the for-itself essentially is, regarded from its 'third person' side, as it were. Only groundlessness articulates facticity and transcendence together. Freedom can only be rooted in itself, that is, on a nothingness – hence a fundamental lack of articulation between facticity and transcendence that is always liable to degenerate into *bad faith*. For Sartre, freedom is essentially nihilation (which is groundless in that it is the groundlessness itself at the heart of being), that is, a sort

6 Kast, 'Un grand film athée', p. 52. Originally: 'Mais on voit si immédiatement la plénitude et la beauté de la forme du film, et ses ennemis mêmes vont la concéder si aisément, qu'il vaut peut-être mieux courir très vite jusqu'à la signification de ce qui est montré.'

7 Kast, 'Un grand film athée', p. 53. Originally: 'Je pense toutefois que la signification du film est bien plus importante que sa place dans le cinéma contemporaine.'

8 *Ibid.* Originally: 'Clouzot dans *Le Salaire de la peur* semble vouloir "faire comprendre" ce qui était latente dans son oeuvre passée.'

of 'unhooking' whereby a for-itself consciousness gets detached from all that causally determines it. 'Bad faith' lies in *disavowing* this process, by assuming either that one is nothing but a result of those causes, or that one has got absolutely nothing to do with them. 'Bad faith' is being stuck in either 'it's me and my arbitrarily self-posited freedom' and/or 'it's the causes having determined me'. The truth is, as it were, in the middle: the for-itself consciousness never *only* depends on those causes (because this view neglects the fundamental contribution of nihilation), nor can it *totally* prescind from them (because in fact one's freedom/nihilation lies precisely in the *positing* of the causes one leaves behind, and which would not exist and be discernible by themselves), but the problem is precisely that *nothing* lies *between* the former and the latter options. Sartre's point, however, is that although nothing *is* in between, something should be *made up*, and the only way to do so is by taking responsibility for one's 'situated' choices.

> The double property of the human being [...] is at once a *facticity* and a *transcendence*. These two aspects of human reality are and ought to be capable of a valid coordination. But bad faith does not wish either to coordinate them nor to surmount them in a synthesis. Bad faith seeks to affirm their identity while preserving their differences. It must affirm facticity as being transcendence and transcendence as being facticity, in such a way that at the instant when a person apprehends the one, he can find himself abruptly faced with the other.[9]

Mario is 'punished' by the film precisely because of his bad faith: he tries to take an easy way out of his situation without facing it, while still keeping one foot in it (his love for Linda).

Rohmer, whose views on cinematic morality immeasurably contributed to shaping the éS's vision, never talked about this film except for a few implicit allusions. The most overt among them will be dealt with later in this chapter. For the time being, it should be mentioned that in a 1953 imaginary dialogue with an unnamed interlocutor (most likely, Pierre Kast), his frustrations boiled over: 'I couldn't care less about these philosophies of behaviour, of failure, or of the absurd';[10] the legitimate suspicion that he might have been referring to (the various vulgarizations of) Sartrean Existentialism, *including Clouzot's film*, is confirmed by the sentence that immediately followed, pointing at the theoretical impasses of *The Transcendence of the*

9 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 56.
10 Rohmer, 'Of Three Films and a Certain School', p. 60.

Ego and *Being and Nothingness*: 'It's a curious contradiction, a conscience that we reduce to the level of an epiphenomenon, and, at the same time, whose claims to freedom we hail!.'[11] In other words: if conscience (for-itself consciousness) is transcendence, where exactly does facticity end, and where does conscience begin? Rohmer seems to imply that the fact that Sartre never makes this clear severely undermines his argument. He appears not to accept that groundlessness can be a valid coordination between the two. Better still: even though he does not overtly say so, such a turn of phrase is tantamount to *an accusation of bad faith*. 'These philosophies of behaviour, of failure, of the absurd' fail, or perhaps refuse, to provide a valid coordination between facticity and transcendence, and so they are charged with distinguishing between them without doing anything to prevent them from merging into a confused identity. Sartre was well aware of the risk that the proper way to articulate facticity and transcendence might simply be nowhere to be found in his philosophical system: 'If bad faith is possible, it is because it is an immediate, permanent threat to every project of the human being; it is because consciousness conceals in its being a permanent risk of bad faith. The origin of this risk is the fact that the nature of consciousness simultaneously is to be what it is not and not to be what it is.'[12]

In fact, Kast's review easily foments this suspicion. On the one hand, it claims that *The Wages of Fear* 'corresponds as exactly as possible, in a cinematic context, to Sartre's views on the novel, or on the dramatic action'; on the other hand, it praises the film because it is *entirely deterministic* ('atheist'), even when it goes back on its otherwise faultless cause-effect texture. But for Sartre, determinism is one of the surest ways to bad faith: it is a way to blame it all on 'objective' causes, thereby calling oneself out.

> Psychological determinism, before being a theoretical conception, is first an attitude of excuse, or if you prefer, the basis of all attitudes of excuse. It is reflective conduct with respect to anguish; it asserts that there are within us antagonistic forces whose type of existence is comparable to that of things. It attempts to fill the void which encircles us, to re-establish the links between past and present, between present and future. It provides us with a nature productive of our acts, and these very acts it

11 *Ibid.* Existentialism is openly attacked (or, more precisely, mocked and downsized) in Domarchi, 'La métamorphose', p. 48. 'Tant pis pour Gertrude Stein', Claude Chabrol's brazen derision against Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Gertrude Stein and all the rest of the Parisian literary scene of the 1930s may also be read as an oblique attack against Sartre.

12 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 70.

> makes transcendent; it assigns to them a foundation in something other than themselves by endowing them with an inertia and externality eminently reassuring because they constitute a permanent game of excuses. Psychological determinism denies that transcendence of human reality which makes it emerge in anguish beyond its own essence. At the same time by reducing us to never being anything but what we are, it reintroduces in us the absolute positivity of being-in-itself and thereby reinstates us at the heart of being.[13]

It follows that not only Mario is in bad faith, but the film itself (the way Kast saw it) is in bad faith. Like all the other characters, Mario is in bad faith, in that he wants to escape a situation 'irresponsibly', without facing it (but still maintaining a connection with it, through Linda). The film contrasts this bad faith by embracing a determinism that is occasionally 'transcended' (when narration 'steps over' narrative with its effects) only to better enhance the original deterministic *parti pris*. In this way, though, *The Wages of Fear* ends up siding entirely with determinism, thus is *itself* in bad faith.

Arguably, Rohmer regarded this contradiction as less Kast's problem than an inherent problem of the existentialist approach as such. Existentialism was a very fashionable trend in those years, and Kast's review only confirms that Clouzot's film was to be ranked among the reverberations of this in popular culture. In Rohmer's eyes, the vulgarizations of that philosophical and aesthetic trend, such as that which led Kast to praise that film, were not simply misleading and mistaken, but rather an inevitable debasement depending on and encouraged by a flaw in the ultimately untenable perspective outlined in *Being and Nothingness*. According to Rohmer, the only way out of the deadlock such attempts to overcome phenomenology cannot but encounter is a return to the distant philosophical origin of phenomenology: the old, more clear-cut Kantian opposition between freedom and mechanistic determinism.

Kant was well aware (it is part of the point of his third antinomy) that the presupposition of a world totally determined by causes and effects will inevitably fall into contradiction, because it can only result in an infinite regression (an effect always has a cause, which, in turn, is caused by something else and so on and so forth, endlessly). His solution was to acknowledge that reason itself is fundamentally twofold: the same reason being caught in the untenable presupposition of the exclusiveness of causal connections is also (in its different use) the reason enabling an uncaused

13 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

(free, noumenal) cause to exist. In this framework, God is just the abstract postulation splitting reason in two and thereby enabling it *not to be the exclusive self-cause of its own freedom while nonetheless being it*, in contrast with Sartre's facticity/transcendence dichotomy.[14] The Sartrean/Clouzotian/Kastian way out of the very same conundrum is the fact that 'nothing' can escape a situation and attain freedom, where 'nothing' here not only means 'not one single thing', but also 'for-itself consciousness' (which is literally a nothingness, and can exist only in a definite situation).

This also includes *the spectator's* for-itself consciousness. Such films as *The Wages of Fear* (more generally, the infamous French 'tradition of quality' despised by Truffaut: vaguely Existentialist films by established directors with intellectual ambitions) were reproached by Rohmer, as well as by the rest of his group, for *cynically* selling the audiences a secret, implicit feeling of being exempt and safe from the unpleasant, hopeless and wholly deterministic world they depicted on the screen, while still acknowledging it to be just like the ordinary, everyday world. Nothing can escape being bound to and determined by one's situation, except the consciousness of the viewer contemplating all that wretchedness from a safe and cynical distance. It is once again a matter of failing to coordinate facticity and transcendence: they put a horrible, mediocre, debased world in front of the viewer, so that the latter can secretly, cynically be reassured of his or her own superiority. For such a viewing subject, transcendence is nothing but the assumption of one's freedom, stemming from the nihilation from a world (that is, the world on the screen) that was nonetheless thought of as stuck in facticity. In other words, these films provided an image of the world qua total facticity (a world dominated by sheer appetite, by cause-effect mechanism, by petty personal interest), so that the viewer could think that: 1) there is no way out of facticity; and 2) I, the viewing subject, am safely removed from the world on the screen (which I nonetheless assume is just like my own), hence I have nihilated from it, hence I am free. This duplicity was possible by keeping a foot in both camps: on the one hand, narrative stuck to total deterministic facticity, on the other hand, in order not to lose the interest of the viewer despite the repulsiveness portrayed on the screen, narration bombarded the viewer's nerves with effects, thereby keeping him or her on a distinct, different level from narrative, emotionally *struck but uninvolved*.

14 It all comes down, once again, to the respective conceptions of self-reflexivity: as we have seen regarding *Stromboli*, God is nothing but the *external* principle enabling reason to fold up on itself in its practical use.

Indeed, Rohmer and his friends openly despised films and directors aiming to provoke a definite emotional effect in the viewer: 'Beware of all winks to the audience, of the sly quest for complicity, of all calls, even discreet, for pity.'[15] What about that other manipulator then, Alfred Hitchcock? Rohmer maintains that the director of *Vertigo* (1958), 'in a subject close to that of *Les Diaboliques* [Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1955], [...] is reluctant to play on our nerves.'[16] A dubious statement at best: how could one ever say that Hitchcock does not play with the emotions of the audience?[17] One of the things Rohmer liked most in *The Trouble with Harry* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1955) was that it instilled in the viewer *both* contempt *and* empathy toward the characters.[18] In front of that film, the viewer is compelled to acknowledge to be as petty and miserable as the characters (while Clouzot's adrenaline is there precisely to distract the viewer from this awareness). Hitchcock's manipulation of the audience was a way to *involve* the audience – or, more precisely, to make involvement inseparable from dis-involvement, and vice versa.[19] Similarly, in *Rear Window*, the voyeur in front of the screen cannot help but identify *with* that other voyeur *on* the screen, Jeff, the main character, in front of his window. Facticity and transcendence are articulated so that the transcending/nihilating spectator is compelled to recognize herself *within* the facticity she should nihilate from. Such an attitude is, in Rohmer's view, *moral*: it unmasks freedom as dependent not on the groundless arbitrariness of the

15 Rohmer, 'The Classical Age of Cinema', p. 42.

16 Rohmer, 'Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*', p. 170.

17 In fact, the attempt to downsize Hitchcock's alleged sensationalist side has been from the very beginning part and parcel of the éS's campaign to promote him as an *auteur*. Already in 1950, Jacques Rivette maintained that, contrary to the generally held view, Hitchcock was not a sensationalist director: his films never lost sight of the distinction between the essential and the spectacular, and never sacrificed the former for the sake of the latter. For instance, in the scene of *Under Capricorn* where a horse breaks a leg, the camera does not show the animal but the main characters looking at it, because the dramatic tension *between those two characters* is about to explode in the following scene. 'If the most outward details of the story, those whose macabre evidence imposes itself, are underlined by a brusquely heavy line, that's because Hitchcock indeed loves to get rid entirely of the spectacular side of a plot by way of excess; that is to say, by taking on the outrageousness of such details, he releases the viewers from the concern of having to deal with it themselves.' Originally: '[S]i les détails les plus extérieurs de l'anecdote, dont s'imposait la macabre évidence, sont soulignés d'un trait brusquement alourdi, c'est qu'Hitchcock aime en effet se débarasser par l'excès de tout le côté spectaculaire d'un intrigue et, en assumant l'outrance de tels détails, décharger le spectateur du souci de s'en préoccuper lui-même'. Rivette, 'Under Capricorn,' p. 4.

18 Rohmer, 'Castigat ridendo...', p. 38.

19 To a large extent, this contradictory attitude matches what Richard Allen termed (in relation to Hitchcock) *metaskepticism*. Allen, 'Hitchcock, or the Pleasures of Metaskepticism', p. 227.

individual, but rather on an inherent conflict that is everybody's (including, of course, fictional characters as well as 'real people'). And this is why, according to him, Clouzot and Hitchcock are both manipulators, but each in an entirely different way. In the former case, the inherent impasse of the distinction between facticity and transcendence is *disavowed*, because the viewer qua nihilating subject (that is, transcendence) is pushed offscreen by Clouzot's manipulation (in that the viewer is unaffected by any form of empathy or identification toward the characters). In Hitchcock's case, the inherent impasse of the distinction between facticity and transcendence is *made overt*, in that empathy or identification toward the characters is part and parcel of Hitchcock's manipulation, thereby dragging a no-less-scornful viewer (transcendence) inside the screen (facticity). Thereby, the English master 'sends us back to ourselves and encourages to go deeply into the idea we have of ourselves.'[20] Hitchcock's cinema thus stands for the overcoming of bad faith (or of voyeurism, which amounts to the same thing); whoever is in bad faith cynically neglects to take into account the subject's original ('transcendental') involvement in the very production of the 'objectively repulsive' appearances he or she secretly rejoices to be removed from (in a Kantian vein, 'the categories or rules of the unifying activity of the mind are further conditions of the ability of the self to be actively related to what is given in sensation'[21]). In short, the subject in bad faith pretends to overlook that one is part and parcel of the ugly world one supposes to deplore from a distance.

Hence the critic's stern aversion to the *smugness toward negativity* which, in his view, infested his time. He often condemned the disillusioned cynicism, the nihilism, the lack of hope and belief, the cheap pessimism,[22] 'the affected disdain, the taste for facile parody, that too many intellectuals on both continents still consider to be the finest of fine art.'[23] He did not like films displaying self-awareness[24] and ironical contempt toward their subject matters, their characters and their situations (this is why he never liked,

20 Rohmer, 'La nef des fous', p. 37. Originally: '[Il] renvoie chacun à soi et l'amène à creuser l'idée qu'il se fait de lui-même.'

21 Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, p. 42.

22 According to him, cheap pessimism was Ingmar Bergman's sole drawback, although he is ready to acknowledge that his world 'is not systematically sickening like that of Zola, Sartre and Céline' ('[il] n'est pas systhématiquement nauséabond comme celui de Zola, de Sartre et de Céline'). Rohmer, 'Présentation d'Ingmar Bergman,' p. 8.

23 Rohmer, 'The Quintessence of the Genre: Cukor', p. 156.

24 See for instance Rohmer, 'La cité disparue'.

among others, Billy Wilder[25]). 'We are tired of finding, in almost all the best films, a sort of humour by which the director, or even the scriptwriter, means to show that the topic treated is worthwhile because beneath the serial style or melodramatic appearance he can detect a hidden significance.'[26] Jean-Luc Godard had no qualms about despising 'those mean spirits who are foolish enough to applaud the contemptible – whether in the work of Buñuel or Malaparte,'[27] and when he interviewed Rohmer about an amateur film he was shooting at that time, his older colleague declared 'I shall be only too happy to deal with magnanimity and modesty instead of the hatred and disgust which our elders, alas, have grown accustomed to';[28] four years later, he welcomed *Rebel without a Cause* as a film in which 'the word "honour" [...] loses none of its pure, dazzling brilliance.'[29] More generally, as a film critic, he always tried to affirm that freedom, the positive and the beautiful *existed* and were still possible, in a world that he perceived as happy with the resigned contemplation of ugliness, negativity, absurdity and emptiness. 'Innocence' and 'sincerity' were regularly, tirelessly commended in the reviews by Rohmer and the others. Alain once exalted Chateaubriand for his commitment to a *critique des beautés* ('criticism focusing on beauties'); Rohmer openly intended to do the same.[30]

According to Rohmer, films affected by smugness toward negativity (like *The Wages of Fear*) are immoral: they have no soul. What could this mean? As we have seen in a previous chapter, for Rohmer (following Astruc), cinema, as it were, detaches imagination from the understanding. Cinema, qua externalized imagination, performs the synthesis of the manifold of appearances relatively apart from the categories shaping sensibility brought along by whoever actually perceives the ensuing flow: simple viewers, as well as anybody organizing or shaping the images in any way, apply their sensible intuition, understanding and reason on a flow primarily determined by cinema's mechanical, externalized imagination. Causality is one of those categories. Therefore, cinema is *by its own nature* inclined to highlight a certain discord between moving images (resulting from that synthesis) and causality, in that the mechanical determinism of the automatized synthesis

25 See for instance Rohmer, 'Témoin à charge'. Godard too loathed him, for the same reason: 'Only he who takes comedy seriously deserves to succeed in it'. Godard, '*The Lieutenant Wore Skirts*; *Artists and Models*', p. 35.

26 Rohmer, 'The Romance is Gone', p. 35.

27 Godard, '*Strangers on a Train*', p. 24.

28 Godard, '*Les petites filles modèles*', p. 31.

29 Rohmer, 'Ajax or the Cid?', p. 115.

30 Rohmer, 'Les lecteurs des *Cahiers* et la Politique des auteurs', p. 55.

of the manifold of appearances *clashes with* another, essentially different and displaced kind of mechanical determinism: the one represented by the cause-effect texture known as 'narrative'.[31] Thanks to this clash between two different kinds of determinism, which is tantamount to an *internal deflagration of mechanical determinism*, cinema can be said to bear a strong affinity with freedom (and ethics more generally). When Rohmer says that cinema is 'an art that, earlier lowered to the level of a serial story, now strives to find the best of its inspiration in the belief in the *soul*,'[32] 'soul' essentially stands for this discord between imagination and understanding/reason, between the flow of images qua images and the same images qua mere support of an unfolding story.

No such discord can be found in *The Wages of Fear*. Therein, the flow of images synthesized by cinema's mechanical imagination and the cause-effect texture imposed by reason are *in perfect accordance* with each other, because any possible discord between them is unfailingly extinguished by a perfect dramatic machine neatly intertwining narrative and narration, so that the latter channels, as it were, anything that exceeds narrative back within the premises of narrative itself (as we have seen in the previous pages). By means of this interaction between narrative and narration, a *meaning* is successfully conveyed, namely that one cannot escape one's situation 'irresponsibly', without facing it (it has already been noticed that for Rohmer there could be hardly anything less cinematic than a film trying to express a predetermined meaning).

Thus, some kind of imbalance between narrative and narration seems the inescapable precondition for some 'soul' (so intended) to emerge. Alfred Hitchcock is once again an excellent case in point. Whilst no less a consummate manipulator than Clouzot, Hitchcock not only uses dramatic effects, but *renders them explicit and visible* within the film. Here is what Godard wrote about the cymbals scene in *The Man who Knew Too Much* (1957): 'The clash of cymbals has the affectation of a commonplace. The effect is crude, but would be even cruder if it tried to disguise itself, to sneak by without

31 This conception too is firmly rooted in Astruc. Raymond Bellour showed that as early as in the late 1940s, Astruc asserted that in novels the 'truth of beings' (Bellour, *Alexandre Astruc*, p. 53) must entertain an inherently ambivalent relationship with plot. Plot is there just as a pretext in order to let the inner truth of characters shine from within its folds (p. 36), but it is nonetheless *indispensable*. As Pouillon (quoted by Bellour) put it: 'Novel is a genre whose only interest resides in the disqualification of that which is essential to it' ('Le roman est un genre qui n'a d'intérêt que par la disqualification de ce qui lui est pourtant indispensable'), namely plot. Pouillon, *Temps et roman*, p. 265, quoted by Bellour in *Alexandre Astruc*, p. 43.

32 Rohmer, 'The American Renoir', p. 175.

drawing attention to itself. People say that Hitchcock lets the wires show too often. But because he shows them they are no longer wires. They are the pillars of a marvellous architecture design made to withstand our scrutiny.'[33] 'Wire' here is a (poor) translation of *ficelle*, which in French also means 'a cheap narrative/dramatic effect.' Chabrol and Rohmer agreed: 'Though neither one scorns to jangle our nerves, the very baldness of these effects purifies them, makes them more "fascinating" than really terrifying. At the highest point of the emotion in which they grip us they nevertheless permit us the distance necessary to the contemplation of great works of art.'[34] By drawing attention to themselves, they supplement their purposiveness (their being intended to strike the viewer) with a properly aesthetic (in Kantian terms) absence of purpose: his effects not only act upon the viewer, but are also offered for detached, disinterested contemplation. Rohmer too maintained that the very same scene (the cymbals scene in *The Man who Knew Too Much*) intertwined ironic detachment and emotional involvement: 'There is a lot of irony in this showcase, an irony that does not prevent us to shake and be moved, between two smiles, by the tears and the premonitory shout of the heroine.'[35]

Hitchcock's overuse of narration over narrative gives rise to an imbalance. Narration is no longer the efficient support of narrative: it *replaces* narrative, it offers itself as the veritable subject matter, the thing to be seen in place of the story. This imbalance, in Rohmer's view, leaves plenty of space for soul to emerge.

5.2. Films with a soul

What, then, were the films 'with a soul'? Rohmer is particularly attached to Roberto Rossellini's *Europe '51* (1952), which he reviewed in *CC*, two months after 'Un grand film athée', the article by Pierre Kast on *The Wages of Fear* that repeatedly makes fun of 'spiritualist film critics,' among whom Rohmer and his young followers undoubtedly ranked. In this respect, 'Génie du christianisme' is to be read also as a retaliation. As Antoine de Baecque rightly pointed out,[36] there is little doubt that passages such as 'The last

33 Godard, '*The Man Who Knew Too Much*', p. 38.

34 Chabrol and Rohmer, *Hitchcock*, p. 103.

35 Rohmer, 'Nouveauté Hollywoodiennes', pp. 745-746. Originally: 'Il y a dans cet étalage, beaucoup d'ironie, ironie qui ne nous empêche pas, entre deux sourires, de trembler et d'être touchés par les pleurs et le cri prémonitoire de l'héroine.'

36 De Baecque, *Les Cahiers du Cinéma: histoire d'une revue*, p. 86.

films of Rossellini finally give us the opportunity to glimpse the limits of this pleasant atheism to which contemporary cinema generally owes its most admired works'[37] are not-so-hidden-references to 'Un grand film athée', Kast's review of Clouzot's film (which in the meantime won the Grand Prix at 1953 Cannes Film Festival). Charlie Chaplin's *Limelight* (1952) and Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto D* (1952) are also implicitly referenced towards the end of the article: like *The Wages of Fear*, they are accused of reducing even miracles to the sheer concatenation between causes and effects. 'Be an atheist, and it [the movie camera] will provide the spectacle of a world without God where there is no other law than the pure mechanism of cause and effect, a universe of cruelty, horror, banality, and mockery.'[38] But, according to Rohmer, Rossellini's film shows us, like Renoir's *The Golden Coach*, that mechanism is not all there is to it: 'She [the heroine] replaces the mechanism of a well-rehearsed gesture, the bestiality or poverty of good manners with, here [in *The Golden Coach*], innocence, there, the freedom of nature, the miracle of a transformed flesh: the soul shows itself, drowns the body in its light, shapes it into its own image, surrounds it by an aura of clarity which discolours, tarnishes everything in its passage.'[39]

Kast certainly had good reasons to label Rohmer 'a spiritualist'. However, his spiritualism deserves to be inspected more closely.

> The work of Rossellini is so profoundly permeated with Christian symbolic that the most immediately sensible appearance lets itself being spontaneously divided into that which involves the flesh, and that which involves the spirit. I used the word 'symbol' for lack of a better one: such art is metaphorical like that of stained glasses and cathedrals, but, its incapacity to make explicit the relation between sign and idea, between the invisible and the visible, endows it with the extraordinary power of turning that which is only a premonition or fleeting impression into the intensity of an evidence. [...] The originality of Rossellini lies in having taken the

37 Rohmer, 'Génie du Christianisme', p. 46. Originally: 'Les dernières films de Rossellini nous permettent enfin d'entrevoir les limites de cet aimable athéisme auquel le cinéma contemporain doit en général ses oeuvres les plus admirés.'

38 *Ibid.*, p. 45. Originally: 'Soyez athée, elle [the movie camera] vous offrira le spectacle d'un monde sans Dieu où il n'est d'autre loi que le pur mécanisme de la cause et de l'effet, univers de cruauté, d'horreur, de banalité, de dérision.'

39 *Ibid.*, p. 44. Originally: 'A la mécanique du geste appris, à sa bestialité ou sa pauvreté de bon ton elle [the heroine] substitue, là [in *The Golden Coach*], l'innocence, la liberté de la nature, ici, le miracle d'une chair transfigurée: l'âme se montre au jour, noie le corps dans sa lumière, le forme à son image, le cerne d'un aura de clarté qui décolore, ternit tout à son approche.'

> cues from this very vision (and indeed no staging work has ever been so deliberately objective, so roughly documentary), and has refused with such rigour to submit to that subtle (so they say) game which, through the interference of the effect and the intention (a more or less clever blend of what is shown and what is suggested) proudly gives us access to the mysteries of that inner life which in principle it denies.[40]

There is no such naïve spiritualism in a passage like the one above; images are not expected to be the seat of a magical transubstantiation of some unspecified spirit on the moving images. What is at stake is rather a kind of *negative* spiritualism: cinema's power to reveal the spirit through 'the intensity of appearance' is due to its *inability* to establish a relationship between sign and idea: cinema's *manifestation* of spirit does not lie in the visualization of some invisible entity or substance, but in the pure *denial of expression*. Rossellini is praised because he maintains the original paradox of Christianity: body and spirit are characterized by 'so tight a unity and, at the same time, so infinite a distance.'[41] Christian incarnation does not presuppose a preceding spirit that *then*, somehow, becomes incarnated in the flesh: its primary condition is the *utter abandonment* of spirit (God abandoning Jesus on the cross), so that all the flesh can manifest is *this very abandonment*, which, in turn, is something as spiritual as anything can ever be, because it shows the divinity of man, i.e. the divinity of what lacks divinity itself. As Godard put it, cinema is the 'most religious of arts, since it values man above the essence of things and reveals the soul within the body.'[42] The spiritual – in the broadest sense, i.e. to be also intended as 'meaning' – is the total absence of spirit (meaning) – *not* the *expression* of meaning (that is,

40 *Ibid.*, p. 45. Originally: 'L'oeuvre de Rossellini est si profondément imprégnée de la symbolique chrétienne que l'apparence la plus immédiatement sensible s'y laisse spontanément diviser en ce qui, en elle, participe à la chair et ce qui participe à l'esprit. J'ai employé le mot de symbole, n'en possédant pas d'autre: un tel art est métaphorique comme celui des vitraux et des cathédrales, mais, de son impuissance à expliciter le rapport du signe à l'idée, de l'invisible au visible, il tire cet extraordinaire pouvoir de donner l'intensité d'une évidence à ce qui n'est, d'ailleurs, que pressentiment, fugace impression. […] L'originalité de Rossellini est d'être parti de cette vision même, et jamais travail de mise en scène ne fut plus délibérément objectif, plus grossièrement documentaire, ne refusa avec une telle rigueur de se plier à ce jeu, dit-on subtil, qui, par l'interférence de l'effet et de l'intention, un plus ou moins savant dosage de ce qu'on montre et de ce qu'on suggère se targue de nous faire accéder aux mystères d'une vie intérieure qu'en son principe il nie.'

41 *Ibid.*, 'Génie du Christianisme', p. 46. Originally: 'Une si étroite union et en même temps une si infinie distance.'

42 Godard, 'Defense and Illustration of Classical Construction', p. 26.

of Godard's 'essence of things'). Ingrid Bergman (here playing the heroine), says Rohmer, is not just made to look like an angel, but rather she is made to look like a beast as much as like an angel. 'It may be because, of all mimetic arts, it is the most rudimentary, the nearest to mechanical reproduction, that cinema is able to more closely detect the metaphysical essence of the man, or of the world':[43] once again, the key point is the 'divorce' between the imagination (mechanically providing the synthesis of the manifold of appearances) and the understanding (and ensuing reason), at the root of the detachments between visual presentation and narrative conceptualization, body and spirit, sign and idea, visible and invisible.[44] 'Effects' and 'intentions', conversely, attempt to stitch up these cracks.

Rossellini's overt clumsiness when it comes to effects and intentions, viz. more broadly narrative and dramaturgy, has been stressed by several commentators over the years. According to Rohmer, this is precisely why he is so brilliant. Rossellini's films reveal the soul insofar as he *refuses* to play Clouzot's game, to treat the viewer as the intended, indeterminate recipient of some emotional effect, to reduce his films to a depiction of deeds concatenated as causes and effects,[45] and interior life to something merely waiting to be *expressed*, and/or to be engulfed in a cause-effect chain ('psychological determinism'). In the long quotation above, the adjectives 'documentary' and 'objective' do not refer to any alleged capability to 'faithfully represent reality', but rather to the refusal of the aforementioned, causality-oriented shortcuts of fiction.[46] This refusal to entirely rely on causality sheds a

43 Rohmer, 'Génie du Christianisme', p. 45. Originally: 'C'est peut-être parce que, de tous les arts d'imitation, il est le plus rudimentaire, le plus proche de la reproduction mécanique que le cinéma est à même de cerner de plus près l'essence métaphysique de l'homme ou du monde.'

44 This is where Rohmer's Kantism most clearly moulds the éS/pda in such a way as to easily lend itself to be regarded as a bridge toward Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of cinema. Melinda Szaloky (in 'Mutual Images: Reflections of Kant in Deleuze's Transcendental Cinema of Time') has demonstrated that Kant's clash between the imagination and the understanding (underpinning the German philosopher's aesthetics) lies at the very core of Deleuze's 'Time-image'. The latter was also foreshadowed, according to Szaloky, in the 'recollection-images' devised by Henri Bergson, a philosopher Deleuze deemed to be much closer to Kant than Bergson himself ever thought.

45 Godard, 'Defense and Illustration of Classical Construction', p. 27: 'In fact, if the cinema were no more than the art of narration which some would make its proud boast, then instead of being bored, one would take pleasure in those interminable efforts which are concerned above all with exposing in meticulous detail the secret motivations of a murderer or a coquette.'

46 The critic would later write: 'It's not long since I praised *Stromboli* or *Europa '51* for their documentary aspects. But in its construction *Viaggio in Italia* is no closer to the documentary than it is to the melodrama or the fictional romance. Certainly no documentary camera could have recorded the experiences of this English couple in this way, or, more to the point, in this spirit. Bear in mind that even the most direct, least contrived scene is always inscribed in the

decisive light on what has been sketched in the previous paragraph. The manifestation of spirit through appearance *is nothing but appearance qua disjointed from causality while still entangled in it* (that is, from within a story). In short, appearance for appearance's sake, appearance as an end in itself and not as a means in a cause-effect chain – and not, of course, as a means to signify something. While Clouzot and his ilk subordinate appearance to effect, Rossellini (like Hitchcock, in the paradoxical example outlined above) does not. More concretely, this means that Rossellini, instead of putting together a solid dramatic structure, lets his heroine wander from a situation to a different, very loosely related situation, largely neglecting causal connections (the backbone of storytelling), and constantly, almost obsessively (and not unlike *Stromboli*, also starring Ingrid Bergman) gazing upon her and her instinctive, non-dramatized reactions, singularly out of tune but precisely thereby aptly giving shape to a deranged character.[47] Three years later, Rohmer would write:

> Before Rossellini even the most inspired and original of film-makers would feel duty-bound to use the legacy of his precursors. He was familiar with all the ways that, by some kind of conditioned reflex, particular emotional reactions could be provoked in an audience – down to the smallest gesture or movement; and he would play on those reflexes, not try to break them. He would create art, a personal work, that is, but made out of a shared cinematic substance. For Rossellini this substance does not exist. His actors do not behave like the actors in other films, except in the sense that their gestures and attitudes are common to all human beings, but they urge us to look for something else behind this behaviour, something other than what our natural role as spectators would prompt us to recognize.[48]

convention of editing, continuity and selection, and that convention is denounced by the director with the same virulence as he displays in his attack on suspense. His direction of the actors is exact, imperious, and yet it is not at all "acted". The story is loose, free, full of breaks, and yet nothing could be further from the amateur.' Rohmer, 'The Land of Miracles', p. 206.

47 The critic writes something very similar with regards to Erich von Stroheim: 'Instead of resorting to the ellipsis, to the symbol, to the editing effect, to this language we have unlearned and whose means often look rather basic, he just follows the heroes' behavioural repertoire. Everything is on an equal level, there is no climax or anti-climax: this is why he fascinates us, and this is where our embarrassment comes from.' Originally: 'Au lieu de jouer sur l'ellipse, le symbole, l'effet de montage, ce langage que nous avons désappris et dont les moyens nous paraissent souvent rudimentaires, il se contente de suivre ses héros dans le menu de leur comportement. Tout est sur le même plan, il n'y a pas de temps faibles, ni de temps forts, c'est par celà qu'il nous fascine, c'est de là que nait notre gêne.' Rohmer, 'Queen Kelly', p. 3.

48 Rohmer, 'The Land of Miracles', pp. 205-206.

When Rohmer says that the Italian director 'proposed to demonstrate the very existence of the soul by sheer force of what is being exposed to view, namely, the eyes, the attitude, this woman's physical being and her surroundings,'[49] 'sheer force' is the key passage: the existence of the soul is proved by appearance's disjunction from the cause-effect texture; in other words, the revelation takes place *in the gaps*, in the fissures of the narrative texture, typically relying on causes and effects.[50] Rossellini *deepens* and *exploits* the gap between cinema's mechanical imagination (synthesizing the manifold of appearances) and the cause-effect texture provided by understanding and reason. Indeed, this excess over causality is to be conceived in the vein of the relationship between Kant's mechanical, efficient causes and final causes: the latter are only there at all *against the background of* the former. It is not a mere negation, but an internal deflagration of mechanical determinism, obtained by playing out the two mechanical determinisms (that of the mechanical production of moving images and that of storytelling) against each other. Freedom is entangled in the inevitable folds of an impossibly all-encompassing (technical/narrative) mechanism.

This placement of soul in the gaps of mechanism is even more outspoken in Rohmer's review of *Paris Does Strange Things*. In Renoir's film, characters only obey their animal instincts, that is, their 'pathological' (in the Kantian sense) drives. They only care about the satisfaction of their petty, personal needs, *therefore* they are nothing but mechanical puppets in the hands of nature. This 'therefore' (i.e. the identification between a mechanical puppet and the exclusive dependence on natural instincts) is clearly Kantian.[51] 'In mentioning the word *ape*, we evoke an animal, but also, at the same time, a puppet. Renoir is interested in both our most superficial crust and our

49 Rohmer, 'Génie du Christianisme', p. 45. Originally: '[Il] se proposait par la seule force de ce qu'il offre aux yeux, les regards, l'attitude, l'être physique de cette femme et de ceux qui l'entourent, de prouver l'existence de l'âme même.'

50 Years later, Rohmer reiterated that Rossellini's strength lies in this disjunction: 'Sometimes, when continuity is dissolved and there is disharmony between the dynamics of the image and the dynamics of the story, there are melodramatic moments in Rossellini's cinema. Such moments are not to be found in other Italian directors, like Fellini. In Fellini's cinema the two dynamics are always in accordance, but in my opinion Fellini goes less far' (my translation from Italian). Originally: 'A volte, quando c'è dissoluzione della continuità, disarmonia tra la dinamica dell'immagine e la dinamica della storia, ci sono in Rossellini dei momenti melodrammatici. Che non si trovano in altri italiani, come Fellini; in Fellini le due dinamiche restano sempre in accordo, ma a mio avviso Fellini va meno lontano [...].'. Eric Rohmer interviewed by Tassone, 'Incontro con Eric Rohmer', p. 20.

51 See for instance Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 128.

deepest attachments to the earth. The soul is not rejected but finds shelter *where it can* [my emphasis].'[52] Factually, this means that Renoir's direction manages to emphasize that which departs from the mere interconnection of causes and effects (that is, the mere deployment of mechanism). 'In this case, the art must not be grasped in great chunks, but in its embellishments, which is why a second, even a third viewing is necessary. Little by little the puppets lose their mechanical gait, and we become sensitive to a thousand nuances in their acting that had at first escaped us and that explain the rather rough, angular dialogue.'[53] The soul is nothing but the nuances emerging in the gaps within the cause-effect 'mechanical' texture of the film.

'Only a religion that proclaims, according to its numerous dogmas, the existence of a "spiritual flesh" can be satisfied with the insufficiencies, the demanding nature of a mean of expression for which it is less difficult to prove the miracle than to explain the inexplicable.'[54] Rohmer does not say that cinema can prove miracles, but that miracles are proved by the impossibility of explaining what *can* be explained. In other words, there is *a hole at the heart of immanence*,[55] an inherent impasse, a structural impossibility to putting together a faultless cause-effect chain, which cinema can grasp precisely because of cinema's *insufficiencies*, that is, precisely because cinema can grasp nothing but appearance (or, more precisely, thanks to the internal deflagration of mechanical determinism caused by the divorce between the imagination and the understanding/reason). In this sense, transcendence is nothing but this hole at the heart of immanence: 'The refusal of immanence postulates a transcendence.'[56] Idealism is not set against materialism, but appears as its necessary completion.[57] The plot of *Europe 51*, in Rohmer's own words, revolves precisely around the

52 Rohmer, '*Paris Does Strange Things*', p. 184.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

54 Rohmer, 'Génie du Christianisme', p. 46. Originally: 'Seule une religion qui proclame au nombre de ses dogmes l'existence d'une 'chair spirituelle' peut se satisfaire des insuffisances, des exigences d'un moyen d'expression pour lequel il est moins difficile de prouver le miracle que d'expliquer l'explicable.'

55 'What Rossellini strives to blow up, is first and foremost the visible unity of nature.' Originally: 'C'est l'unité visible de la nature que Rossellini s'applique avant tout à faire éclater'. Rohmer, 'Deux images de la solitude,' p. 40.

56 Rohmer, 'Génie du Christianisme', p. 45. Originally: 'L'immanence refusée postule une transcendance.'

57 This point recurs in other articles by Rohmer. While reviewing Fridrikh Ermler's *Neokonchennaya povest* (1955), he noticed that miracles and assertions of superiority of the moral over the physical abounded in Russian cinema's finest works, in spite of that cinema's mandatory materialist bias ('Notre miracle quotidien', p. 40); in a brief comment about Jean Renoir's *The Southerner*, he claimed that that film demonstrated that the alleged materialism of his *Boudu*

deadlock of immanence: human society is portrayed as self-contradictory, since it locks the heroine in a mental institution in the name of tolerance; against society's delusions of full (and in fact contradictory, inconsistent) self-determination, stands freedom qua 'divine' exception (embodied by the heroine).

Although the overall compatibility between Rohmer's Catholicism and Kant is debatable (which, of course, adds to his eclecticism), transcendence being postulated by the limits of immanence is a genuinely Kantian assumption; indeed, the German philosopher tirelessly insisted on the fact that, before turning to God, one had to actually reach those limits[58] (this is precisely the purpose of his metaphysical inquiries in his first *Critique*). At any rate, Rohmer's point here is less religious or philosophical and more *aesthetic*: he especially wants to argue that films cannot rely only (or primarily) on cause-effects chains (that is, on narrative) and on the effects on the viewer 'patching' that chain's inevitable inconsistencies (narration); rather, films should enhance these inconsistencies and emphasize what filters through them, i.e. appearance for appearance's sake, qua disjointed from causality (but still *within* causality, i.e. within a narrative context). The emergence of space (that is, appearance) is here strictly dependent on the flimsiness of time (that is, on the lack of a solid sequentiality). Or, as Simone Weil (whom Rossellini admitted was the major source of inspiration behind the heroine of *Europe 51*) herself put it: 'Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it.'[59]

The case of Robert Bresson's *A Man Escaped* (*Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*, 1956) is only slightly different: it replaces dramaturgy with a different kind of temporal organization. Instead of following the regular dramatic curve, with its standard alternation of peaks and troughs, the action follows a daringly unvarying rhythm that completely prescinds from dramaturgy (not to mention that the abrupt introduction of a new character at that particular point of the timeline, as Rohmer himself seems to imply, is a patent infringement of the way 'well-made plays' should be constructed). Actions are painstakingly concatenated according to cause-effect law, but this concatenation totally disregards the need to keep the

Saved from Drowning (*Boudu sauvé des eaux*, 1932) and *Paris Does Strange Things* was in fact not completely materialist ('The Southerner', p. 81).

58 When Keith Tester writes that Rohmer, both in his reviews and in his films, frequently focussed on 'the irruption of God in the everyday,' he neglects the Kantian caution Rohmer was well aware of and followed, and mistakes a final cause for a mechanical, efficient cause. Tester, *Eric Rohmer: Film as Theology*, p. 17.

59 Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 10.

viewer's attention alive through traditional dramatic tricks: it just follows its own course. 'Everything is physically explicable, but it is precisely for this reason, that is, because we follow in detail a series of difficulties, of obstacles that are overcome one after the other, that the word *miracle* can be uttered, as Bresson invites us to do.'[60] It can be said that whereas Rossellini played with the gap between the flow of synthesized appearances and the cause-effect narrative textures, Bresson organized them in the manner of an asymptote: the flow of synthesized appearances and the cause-effect narrative textures are a line and a curve infinitely approaching each other without ever touching. The reason why they never overlap is that Bresson's film, unlike Clouzot's, deliberately refuses to drag the viewer inside the cause-effect texture. Whereas Bresson's previous works overtly attempted to reveal the soul, *A Man Escaped* does not, but manages to reveal it *all the more*. Why? Because it is faithful to causes and effects until that which exceeds causes and effects is made visible: it is *the beauty itself* of the actions the hero accomplishes (the lengthy, careful preparations a convict undertakes in order to evade), and that can be regarded as ends in themselves in spite of their rigid causal concatenation, because *they are not meant to strike the viewer*. There is no need to break the cause-effect texture, because beauty/freedom/grace adds itself to it, qua the necessary counterpart of mechanism ('predestination is the surest guarantor of our freedom'[61]), springing from the latter's internal deflagration. The hole at the heart of immanence, the void at the core of mechanism, is already beauty/freedom/grace; one only needs to stick to the mechanism and to resist the temptation to 'patch up' that void by identifying it with the blank slot allocated to the viewer (as the indeterminate recipient of some emotional effect). This film is the triumph of mechanical determinism – but, by the same token, mechanical determinism loses its purposiveness along the way: 'And then, little by little, at the same time as boards work loose, as hooks curve, as ropes are braided, a new order of thought comes to replace the old one, in our spirit just as in that of the prisoner. The world of ends grafts itself onto the world of causes.'[62]

60 Rohmer, 'Le miracle des objets', p. 44. Originally: 'Tout est matériellement explicable, mais c'est précisément pour cela, parce que nous suivons dans le détail la série des difficultés, des obstacles tour à tour éludés qu'il nous est permis, ainsi que Bresson nous y invite, de prononcer le mot *miracle*.'

61 *Ibid.* Originally: 'La prédestination est le plus sur garant de notre liberté.'

62 Rohmer, 'Le miracle des objets', p. 43. Originally: 'Et alors, peu à peu, en même temps que se descellent les planches, se tordent les crochets, se tressent les cordes, un ordre nouveau de réflexion vient se substituer à l'ancien, dans notre esprit comme dans celui du prisonnier. Sur le monde des causes se greffe celui des fins.'

Approximately the same principle (the total, unconditioned endorsement of narrative causality as the key to finally overcome causality) applies to the most relentlessly causality-oriented cinema ever: Hollywood cinema, which Rohmer and his group admired like no other. In his review of *Bigger than Life* (1956), after stating in the first two paragraphs that it is no melodrama, no Sartre and no Faulkner, Rohmer goes on to explain why Nicholas Ray's is not a drama (that is, a narrative construction characterized by the immanence of causes and effects), but a tragedy (where a moment of transcendence is somehow envisaged – typically, in the guise of the irruption of fate, or of the Gods, in a human context). If, on the one hand, there is no fate and no *deus ex machina*, on the other hand the scene when the main character is about to kill his own child (a blatant reference to Abraham's sacrifice) enacts a *moral paradox* shattering the hitherto very regular and very logical concatenation of causes and effects. What had been looking all along like a deterministic explanation of a family man's madness (i.e. cortisone made him so) in fact concealed an inherent, original, underlying contradiction: cortisone did nothing but *enhance* a moral contradiction, which had been there from the outset. 'In this combat, which materialism seems to have won in advance, the soul is the victor, not so much because of the providential dizziness that holds back Avery's arm, as because of the particular air one breathes, from the very beginning right to the last shot, an air of the same quality, in that it is graceful without pathos, as the final images of *Ordet* (*The Word* [Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1955]) or *Europe 51*.'[63] Soul (that is, freedom and grace) is thus nothing but *air*, and this air is 'the ever-so-precise attention to small things and the refusal to enjoy only their picturesque qualities, the glances that betray the concerns of love, rather than curiosity, fear, or any other sentiment, this strong sense of both man's earthly attachments and his freedom.'[64] It is the excess of appearance over narration's causality.[65]

This excess is none other than what Christian Keathley called the 'cinephiliac moments': those filmic epiphanies occurring whenever a spectator spots

63 Rohmer, 'Nicholas Ray: *Bigger than Life*', p. 145.

64 *Ibid.* Another example of 'soul qua air' can be found in his 'Un nouveau visage de la pudeur'.

65 Siegfried Kracauer, another film theorist heavily influenced by Kant, developed a conception of cinema whereby 'plot is constantly interrupted by [fragmentary] images of *physical reality*' (my emphasis), rather than by an excess of appearance. Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema*, p. 177. This goes a long way towards accounting for the difference separating these otherwise fairly similar critics/theorists. Films matching Kracauer's hypothesis are 'composed of instants whose only *raison d'être* is their instantaneousness [and which] appear to be interlinked at random, without any logic or necessity.' Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 256. This more or less holds for Rohmer too, but for him it is more a matter of emergence of appearance rather than of physical reality.

something striking in the moving images, without that 'something' being 'the main point' of those images, viz. that which is intended to grab the spectator's attention at that particular moment. On the contrary, as a rule, the object of 'cinephiliac moments' is something at the *margins* of the unfolding of the story, and of whatever is going on in the film. As Paul Willemen put it,

> What is being looked for is a moment, or, given that a moment is too unitary, a dimension of a moment which triggers for the viewer either the realisation or the illusion of a realisation that what is being seen is in excess of what is being shown. Consequently you see something that is revelatory. It reveals an aspect or a dimension of a person, whether it's the actor or the director, which is not choreographed for you to see. It is produced *en plus*, in excess or in addition, almost involuntarily. [...] Whether or not it's voluntary doesn't particularly matter. If you can systematise the production of these voluntary/involuntary moments, then you become a genius screen presence or a genius director (as in the directorial touches of a Lubitsch or Hitchcock).[66]

Nicholas Ray is, according to Rohmer, one of those genius directors. In his film, what is being seen is in excess of what is shown:

> He is highly adept at the art of playing with the totality of the set, and although his frames are rather compact, he is able to avoid making them heavy. But he is still a painter, not only because he uses the power of colour well – which is more expressive than decorative (Barbara Rush's orange-coloured dress, the violet of the bottle, the red of the child's blouse, accentuated by a mostly beige harmony and by the skill of cameraman Joe McDonald) – but because by slightly slowing the pace or by accelerating it a bit too much, by inserting a pause that lasts perhaps not more than a fraction of a second, he is able to give the simplest gesture an eternal quality, thereby making it expressive as it is handsome. He is able to make his film's most important shots: a woman filling a bathtub with a kettle or standing stiffly in her new dress, a child holding a football or digging through a pile of shirts, or again, kneeling on his bed, handing the football to his father who is entering the room.[67]

Crucially, the emerging of appearance (the bestowal of 'an eternal quality' to 'the simplest gesture') is here tied to temporal discontinuity ('by slightly

66 Willemen, *Looks and Frictions*, p. 237.
67 Rohmer, 'Nicholas Ray: *Bigger than Life*', p. 143.

slowing the pace or…'). But even more crucially, the critic hastens to add: 'Outside their dramatic context, these gestures undoubtedly lose some of their expression and beauty, but to try to detach them is as senseless as separating the arabesque from a Raphael painting.'[68] As Willemen put it, 'it is no accident, indeed it is highly necessary, that cinephilia should operate particularly strongly in relation to a form of cinema that is perceived as being highly coded, highly commercial, formalised and ritualised. For it is only there that the moment of revelation or excess, a dimension other than what is being programmed, becomes noticeable.'[69] Appearance for appearance's sake thrives in the gaps of the cause-effect texture ('it is in arbitrary situations, or more specifically in situations dependent on a contingent fact, that such gestures find their moment to bloom'[70]), thus essentially *needs* that texture in the first place – just as much as freedom is not distinct from mechanism, but is only the other side of the same coin. What is needed is *either* the cause-effect linear chain *and* that which departs from it. 'The camera, like a microscope, detects a wide surface where we saw only a line':[71] an evocative sentence that nonetheless very clearly indicates that what keeps the camera (synthesizing the manifold of appearances) and the narration apart is the very fact that they stand for different faculties: imagination in one case (discovering the 'wide surface' of the visual flow it synthesizes), understanding/reason in the other (drawing the line of the unfolding story). This clash between two substantially different flows

68 *Ibid.*

69 Willemen, *Looks and Frictions*, p. 238.

70 Rohmer, 'Nicholas Ray: *Bigger than Life*', p. 144. An example taken from Godard's review of *The Wrong Man*: 'Through this camera movement he manages to express a purely physical trait: the contraction of the eyelids as Fonda closes them, the force with which they press on the eyeballs for a fraction of a second, creating in the sensory imagination a vertiginous kaleidoscope of abstractions which only an equally extravagant camera movement could evoke successfully. A film comprising only such notations would be nothing; but one in which they are thrown into the bargain – that film is everything. Since *Rear Window*, Hitchcock has deliberately multiplied this sort of "epidermic" effect, and if he relegates the plot thread to the background, he does so the better to reveal its palpable beauty by fits and starts.' Godard, '*The Wrong Man*', p. 51.

71 Rohmer, 'Nicholas Ray: *Bigger than Life*', p. 145. When Rohmer wrote (in 'La dernière chasse') 'I wonder whether the reference that cinema makes us establish, that is, the reference to this very reality upon which fiction builds its foundation, is cinema's weakness, the chink in the armour, or rather its power, its originality. It would be tricky to decide. Let's provisionally say: both' ('Est-ce le point faible du cinéma, le défaut de sa cuirasse, ou sa force, son originalité, que cette référence qu'il nous amène à établir avec la réalité même sur laquelle la fiction établit ses assises. Il serait délicat de trancher. Répondons provisoirement: les deux'), he was referring precisely to this interplay between the story and visual appearances, the 'line' and the 'wide surface' needing one another.

engenders a sort of temporal inconsistency that appearance for appearance's sake fills up.

This mutual dependence between the disruption of the cause-effect texture and its intactness is openly tackled in Rohmer's review of *Journey to Italy* (*Viaggio in Italia*, 1954) by, again, Rossellini. 'Because they [*Journey to Italy* and Murnau's *Sunrise*] refuse to illuminate the mechanics of choice, both films safeguard its freedom all the better. Thus the soul is delivered up to its own resources, and finds no higher purpose than in the recognition of order in the world.'[72] Notoriously, the last scene of the film is a miracle reuniting a constantly quarrelling married couple of English tourists visiting southern Italy. The critic's definition of 'miracle' is the 'supreme disorder' on which order itself is founded. 'If the film succeeds – logically, you could say – through a miracle, it is because that miracle was in the order of things whose order, in the end, depends on a miracle.'[73] This paradox is mirrored, says Rohmer, by his own paradoxical viewing experience: the more he watched the film, the more he got distracted and thought about something else, but the more he thought about something else, the more he ultimately ended up thinking of the subject matter of the film, finding himself at the very core of it after whatever detour he would make.[74] Therefore, the word 'miracle' here ultimately seems to designate less some supernatural entity landing somehow on earth, than the mere fact that order is based on its own disruption. Of course, this includes *narrative* order. *Journey to Italy* is certainly not short of digressions, perhaps even more than *Europe 51* was: what the cause-effect narrative texture only laboriously tries to get at, appearance for appearance's sake is able to manifest immediately, by means of disrupting that texture in various ways; accordingly, the abrupt, fully external miracle taking place at the very end reunites the main characters, whereas in the rest of the film this same reunion failed to be accomplished by way of the regular unfolding of a psychological drama (itself frequently interrupted along the way by several visual epiphanies preparing the final, decisive one).

Not infrequently, for Rohmer 'miracles' are a straightforward matter of dramaturgy. Notoriously, in the last scene of Dreyer's *Ordet*, a character resurrects shortly after her death. In Rohmer's review (whose last paragraph references tragedy and the concept of sublime), that miracle is the logical and necessary outcome of the way the story is arranged. Dreyer adopts a

72 Rohmer, 'Land of Miracles', p. 207.
73 *Ibid.*
74 Rohmer, 'Land of Miracles', pp. 206-207.

completely detached point of view: by means of his careful stylistic abstraction, he displays nothing but empty appearances, unencumbered by any manifestation of the spiritual.

> Nothing invites us to penetrate consciences, there is no call for feelings: we see, we listen, and the predilection for continuity can only confirm this impression. But the mystery is perhaps even greater, because no door is being offered for it to be penetrated: one can only grasp appearance, while still knowing all along that it is nothing but appearance.[75]

As the film unfolds, this refusal to show any manifestation of the spiritual, while every character *talks* about it a lot, increasingly creates a strange tension in the viewer, one that only the final miracle can appease. During most of the film, the dramatic curve is totally flat, then, shortly before the end a handful of events (a man starts to cry, a little girl smiles and so on) suddenly and quickly start to build up a sort of emotional paroxysm, and then the final miracle happens. The miracle *had* to happen because, hitherto, everything had been so flat: a logic is thus being followed, a purely dramaturgic logic that works completely apart from the concatenation of causes and effects normally supposed to form a 'sound' plot (most notably, the final resurrection blatantly breaks with causal consistency). It is the exact opposite of Bresson's *A Man Escaped*, which displayed a faultless cause-effect texture while neglecting any deliberate dramaturgic effect on the viewer. In that case, the narrative/narration unbalance privileges the former over the latter, while *Ordet*'s privileges the latter over the former.

Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man*, an unlikely tale based on a true story, is praised because it merges the ordinary and the extraordinary. The normal time of daily life and the discontinuous time of the miracle are brought together in a way that disregards the laws of dramaturgy: fractures in the narrative texture do not occur when they are supposed to occur to keep the viewer awake. The film displays a very flat, almost 'neorealist' time, until the miracle (a coincidence suddenly exculpating the hero from a false accusation of murder) happens, completely unprepared and dramatically unjustified. 'Real duration replaces the rigged duration of suspense. Like the prisoner, we

75 Rohmer, 'Une Alceste chrétienne', p. 26. Originally: 'Aucune invite à pénétrer dans les consciences, aucun appel au sentiment: nous voyons, nous écoutons, et le parti pris de continuité adopté ici n'est pas sans corroborer cette impression. Mais le mystère est peut-être plus grand, parce qu'on ne nous offre aucune porte pour y pénétrer: nous ne saisissons que l'apparence, tout en sachant que ce n'est qu'apparence.'

don't know what the next moment will bring forth. Everything can happen and this is why everything happens – even miracles.'[76] Once again, this fusion between temporal continuity and discontinuity is matched by spatial revelation, that is, by the crucial visual leitmotif of the *wall*: the hero often finds himself hindered by walls (either actual walls, and virtual walls, i.e. the gazes of other people constantly staring and 'imprisoning' him). This leitmotif, explains Rohmer, is a simultaneous encapsulation of the whole point of the film without being a symbol, because it is but the graphic depiction of its underlying *conflict* (harmless individual vs. capricious, unjust society). Conflict being by definition dynamic and not static, it cannot be what a symbol points to. That image is not 'making a point': it is just illustrating *simultaneously* a conflict being develop throughout the film by drama.

More generally, even when no miracle was involved, Rohmer often tried to detect temporal structures interweaving time's various forms of continuity and discontinuity without complying with the usual constraints of dramaturgy. He noticed, for instance, that Renoir insisted on immobility (unmoving characters and fixed shots) only to build tension and justify thereby an eventual, sudden outburst of motion.[77] Rivette praised Mark Donskoy's *Childhood of Maxim Gorky* (*Detstvo Gorkogo*, 1938) because of its clash between biological time and dramaturgic time: 'In its design, the script manifests a complete disregard for the usual formulas of dramatic progression; separated, fragmentary episodes follow each other only according to the necessity of temporal deployment, with no concern whatsoever for their linkages; unity is ensured by nothing but the sheer permanence of characters, with their slow ageing process replacing "suspense".'[78]

Another example of non-dramaturgic interconnection between continuity and discontinuity is Ingmar Bergman; more than once, Rohmer affirmed that his cinema revolved around a peculiar tension between the instant qua fleeting and the instant qua eternal[79] – or, as Jean-Luc Godard (whose reflections on the Swedish director largely follow his colleague's) put it:

76 Rohmer, 'Le faux coupable'. Originally: 'Au temps truqué du suspense se substitue la durée réelle. De même que le prisonnier, nous ne savons pas ce que l'instant suivant nous réserve. Tout peut arriver et c'est pourquoi tout, même le miracle, arrive.'

77 Rohmer, 'La robe bleue d'Harriet', p. 63.

78 Rivette, 'Les principaux films du rendez-vous de Biarritz'. Originally: 'La conception du scénario prouve un complet dédain des recettes habituelles de la progression dramatique; des épisodes séparés et fragmentaires se succèdent selon la seule nécessité de l'écoulement temporel, sans aucun souci des raccords; l'unité n'est assurée que par la permanence des personnages, leur lent vieillissement tient lieu de "suspense".'

79 See, for instance, Rohmer, 'Présentation d'Ingmar Bergman', p. 8.

> Each of his films is born of the hero's reflection on the present moment, and deepens that reflection by a sort of dislocation of time – rather in the manner of Proust but more powerfully, as though Proust were multiplied by both Joyce and Rousseau – to become a vast, limitless meditation upon the instantaneous. An Ingmar Bergman film is, if you like, one twenty-fourth of a second metamorphosed and expanded over an hour and a half. It is the world between two blinks of the eyelids, the sadness between two heart-beats, the gaiety between two handclaps.[80]

The tension between the instant qua fleeting and the instant qua eternal is, according to the critic, nothing short of tragic: 'What is most original in his films is a feeling of time, a fascination with the past that is generally materialised through flashbacks. Everything ends up being perpetually restarted, but at the same time, that which happened once cannot be repeated: such is the tragic contradiction he traps us in.'[81]

Rohmer seems to believe that cinema is capable of seizing the tragic character of time as such.[82] *Nanook*, for instance, is 'not a tragedy of destiny,

80 Godard, 'Bergmanorama', p. 77. He also wrote: 'Bergman is the film-maker of the instant. His camera seeks only one thing: to seize the present moment at its most fugitive, and to delve deep into it so as to give it the quality of eternity. Hence the prime importance of the flashback, since the dramatic mainspring of each Bergman film is simply the hero's reflection on the moment and his situation at that moment.' Godard, '*Summer with Monika*', p. 85.

81 Rohmer, 'Oeuvre truculente et blasée, *La nuit des forains* nous revèle le visage du plus grand cinéaste suédois Ingmar Bergman.' Originally: 'Ce qu'il y a de plus original chez lui, c'est un sentiment de temps, une fascination du passé, matérialisé en général par des flash-back. Tout est voué à un perpetuel recommencement, mais en même temps, ce qui a été une fois ne peut se réproduire: telle est la contradiction tragique dans laquelle il nous enferme.'

82 Of course, Rohmer was by no means the first to identify cinematic time with tragedy. A few decades before, film theorist and filmmaker Jean Epstein already called 'tragic' the intersection between stillness and movement, continuity and discontinuity. The definition of 'slow motion' (a method that Epstein greatly valued, and used in his films) according to Blaise Cendrars (one of Epstein's main sources of inspiration) 'pertains to the classic tragedy: the ambivalence of slow motion may be regarded as a remnant of the inner conflict experienced by characters who are subject to a set of passionate and duty-bound conflicts resulting in a geometry of double-binds. Likewise, the frozen dialectics of slow motion opposes the temptation of actual movement and the withholding of it. In that sense, slow motion is a tragedy of duration'. Cortade, 'The "Microscope of Time": Slow Motion in Jean Epstein's Writings', p. 168. However, Epstein's Bergsonian bias is fairly at odds with Rohmer's approach, which shows no trace of anything resembling *élan vital*, nor of any emphasis placed on duration in that philosopher's sense. On the other hand, existing English translation (Tom Milne's) prevents the reader from appreciating a few references to Bergson in Godard's film critical production. When he wrote ('*The Wrong Man*', p. 50) that 'once again Alfred Hitchcock proves that the cinema today is better fitted than either philosophy or novel to convey the basic data of consciousness', the original reads *les données immédiates de la conscience* ('the *immediate* data of consciousness'; my emphasis). However, this unambiguous

but of the dimension of time. [...] I will mention only the scene in which we see the Eskimo curled up in the corner of the frame, lying in wait for the flock of seals sleeping on the beach. [...] More than the pathos of action, it is the very mystery of time that creates our anxiety in this scene.'[83] In other words, cinema is able to follow the flow of time, and wait for the seals along with the Eskimo, without any suspense-producing gimmick, until discontinuity comes along, that is, until action unexpectedly bursts in. Here, the 'tragedy of time' is, quite simply, the fact that one instant does not necessarily lead to a similar, immediately following one; that there is a substantial imbalance (one that dramaturgy is not able to set straight) between continuity and discontinuity. 'The particularity of cinematic time, precisely because it is not subordinated to the law of measure and harmony, is *to wrinkle*. Every instant is left alone, whereas the musical note only makes sense in relation to those coming before and after.'[84]

More generally, Rohmer seems to imply that the possibility of freedom (hence: ethics) comes into play in films when the continuous time created by cinema's mechanical imagination clashes somehow with the one narration brings along (thereby leading the mechanical determinism informing both to an impasse); or, which amounts to more or less the same thing, when that continuity is made to face a discontinuity that narration (by definition a systematic, deliberate alternation of continuity and discontinuity) leaves unregulated and disjointed. Freedom is that which springs from the ensuing fracture, and it can have a wealth of equivalent names: grace, the soul, appearance for appearance's sake and the like.

This, too, is to be read in opposition to ellipsis, that much-maligned literary device. The ellipsis, compelling the reader to 'fill in the gaps' left by the deliberate disruption of the ordered sequence of narrative events, stands for a discontinuity that is ultimately restricted to a subjective, contingent distortion of time: it is but a temporalization of the kind a for-itself consciousness brings forth, fostering the kind of mutual interaction between the temporalizations by the narrator, the reader, the characters, etc. taking place in what has already been mentioned (in Chapter one, by

reference to Bergson comes after a few paragraphs basically listing a series of fragments, of unrelated, privileged moments inside the film that mitigate the reference to Bergson by means of a far more Bachelardian reliance on the instant *qua* discontinuous.

83 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 46.

84 Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, p. 103. Originally: 'Or, le propre du temps cinématographique, précisément parce qu'il n'est pas soumis à la loi de la mesure et de l'harmonie, est de grincer. Il laisse chaque instant livré à lui-même alors que la note musicale n'a de sens que par rapport à celle qui la précède et la suit.'

drawing particularly on *What is Literature?*) as the space opened up by the novel. Conversely, what Rohmer has in mind is discontinuity qua an *inherent* breakdown of continuity, a structural fault of mechanism, that continuous flow of causes and effects which cannot but look 'objective' to our eyes (the 'unity of nature'). Here again, we find Rohmer's conflation between 'showing' (as opposed to 'telling'), 'ontology' (as opposed to 'language'), 'space' (as opposed to 'time'): cinema should focus on those inconsistencies at the heart of Being, the space opening up in the breaches of temporal/causal sequences. By showing them (as opposed to patching together continuity and discontinuity the way the mutual interaction between narrative and narration ('telling') usually does), cinema can show the possibility itself of freedom.

Instead, perfect dramatic machines (like *The Wages of Fear*) leave no gap between the synthesis of the manifold of appearances ensured by cinema's mechanical imagination and the narrative attached to it: the former is completely subordinated to the latter. They leave no space for freedom/soul/etc., so they are fundamentally abject. Even worse: they are dramatic instead of being tragic, because they disregard the possibility for freedom to be grounded on its opposite.

5.3. Tragedy

If, on the one hand, freedom in films according to Rohmer is a basically *formal* property (in the sense outlined above), then, on the other hand, freedom is also one of cinema's privileged subject matters. The fight between freedom and necessity is, according to the critic, one of the most inherently cinematic topics ever; this is why cinema, by its own nature, is inclined to revive *ancient tragedy*, on which Rohmer indeed insisted a great deal.

The deep interest in American cinema shown first by éS, and then by the *politique des auteurs* (pda), originated from the belief that Hollywood was the contemporary embodiment of that immortal, universal model.[85] Rohmer often insisted upon the fact that 'every real tragedy always begins with an acceptance of the established order, as difficult as it shows the constraints to be.'[86] Hence, the frequently conservative undertones that can easily be found in his writings: 'If *Nana* is usually appreciated because

85 See, for instance: Rohmer, 'Livres de cinéma', *CC*, 37, p. 58; Rohmer, 'Quand se lève la lune'.
86 Rohmer, 'The American Renoir', p. 177.

we see a fifty-year old on all fours, or *The Crime of Monsieur Lange* (*Le crime de monsieur Lange*) because it is anticlerical, most of the pleasure I had in seeing *The Southerner* for a second time was in admiring a man who loves his wife and believes in God.'[87] Or:

> Since we all opt for order to a greater or lesser extent, let's have the honesty to acknowledge its relevance. I find it beautiful not to refuse to shake hands with a powerful man or with a judge. I admire Billy Mitchell, who replied to the journalists asking him what he thought of the army in the aftermath of the trial: 'It owes me nothing, I owe it everything'.[88]

In the same article (on Otto Preminger's 1955 *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell*), Rohmer touches upon another immediate corollary of the éS/pda's attachment to ancient tragedy: their belief that classical tragic values are *universal* – hence Hollywood's universality. 'The conflict between the ways of genius and the demands of discipline, between individual clairvoyance and the inertia of institutional bodies has been an issue of all times and of all countries.'[89] The critic frequently stated that cinema's vocation lies, above all, in providing the modern form whereby the very classical, universal conflict between will and destiny can find expression.

> This is the strength of American cinema: it can even be out of ideas, except for some schemes it cannot give up, but in them, freedom remains intact, protecting it from the dangers of the thesis and compelling it to stick to man alone. That's why it's so exemplary. A filmmaker from some other nation would have made this story into a pretext to support the rights of actors, of women, of moral anti-conformism or whatever. Here, and in other similar stories, disgrace is a constant menace threatening anybody daring to violate established order. It is a myth, as they say, but a fertile one, because it allows us to penetrate the resources of human agency.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

88 Rohmer, 'La souffrance de l'inventeur', p. 50. Originally: 'Puisque nous optons tous plus ou moins pour l'ordre, ayons l'honneteté de reconnaitre son bien-fondé. Je trouve beau qu'on ne refuse pas la main tendue, fut-ce celle d'un puissant ou d'un juge. J'admire Billy Mitchell répondant aux journalistes qui lui demandent, à l'issue du procès, ce qu'il pense de l'armée: "Elle ne me doit rien, je lui dois tout".'

89 Rohmer, 'La souffrance de l'inventeur', p. 49. Originally: 'Le conflit entre les chemins du génie et les exigences de la discipline, entre la clairvoyance individuelle et l'inertie des corps constitués est de tous les temps et de tous les pays.'

> Furthermore, this myth is reality, because, in this boring world, fate is bidden to table every day, like the Commander in Don Juan.[90]

Freedom can only exist in a context of constriction, both in everyday reality and in filmmaking practice.[91] As late as 1961, Rohmer compared and contrasted *Shadows* (John Cassavetes, 1959) with *La Pyramide Humaine* (Jean Rouch, 1961) by observing that the same theme (race) is approached as contingent in the former case, and as necessary in the latter. Because it relies on necessity, *La Pyramide humaine* attains the level of tragedy and, *as such*, is superior. '[The film's] tragedy rests, as does all true tragedy, not so much on the idea that the world might be good but that in fact we cannot really conceive of it other than the way it is.'[92]

This also explains why, when Rohmer faced the question 'Who is really the eponymous *Mr. Arkadin* of Orson Welles' 1955 film?', the answer he chose was 'less dependent on the director's personal obsessions'[93] than those most critics gave: Arkadin is 'the incarnation of destiny, a modern and omnipresent god, returning from the sky from which he seemed to come (his death is not shown, the plane crashes empty), a vulnerable god, a cruel, yet just god.'[94] In other words: what makes a filmmaker a true auteur is not that his films carry a personal poetics around, but the fact that they somehow (in a very broad sense) comply with the eternal values of tragedy (here: the struggle between men and gods).

So film, according to Rohmer as well as to the éS/pda, in general had to be a celebration of freedom. To be a celebration of freedom, however, meant to show that freedom is based on a universal conflict between freedom and its opposite (necessity). No narrative form is more suited to showing this than

90 Rohmer, 'Jeanne Eagels'. Originally: 'L'atout du cinéma américain, c'est peut-être qu'il n'a pas d'idées, sinon quelques schémas tout faits dont il ne peut sortir, mais à l'intérieur desquels la liberté reste entière. Cela le garde des dangers de la thèse, le force à s'attacher à l'homme seul et c'est pourquoi il est exemplaire. Un cinéaste d'une autre nation eût sans doute pris prétexte d'une telle histoire pour revendiquer les droits du comédien, de la femme, de l'anticonformisme moral, que sais-je! Ici, et dans les autres histoires semblables, le malheur est attaché, comme une punition imminente, à quiconque s'avise de violer l'ordre établi. C'est un "mythe", dit-on, mais c'est un mythe féconde puisqu'il nous permet d'entrer dans les ressorts de l'action humaine. Et, de plus, ce mythe est réalité, car, dans ce monde où l'on s'ennuie, le destin est, comme le Commandeur du Don Juan, convié tous les jours à la table.'

91 The same point, i.e. that only within the framework of solid aesthetic conventions cinema can give a shape to the eternal conflict between will and duty and thereby reinstate classical tragedy, is made in Rohmer, 'Faux coupables et faux innocents'.

92 Rohmer, 'The Taste of Beauty', p. 78.

93 Rohmer, 'A Twentieth Century Tale', p. 138.

94 *Ibid.*

classical tragedy, so cinema had to stick as much as it could to that ancient, universal model. Godard on Jean Renoir: 'Never has a film been so free as *Elena* [*Paris Does Strange Things*]. But deep down inside of things, freedom is necessity. And never, too, has a film been so logical.'[95] This also explains Rohmer's and the éS/pda's insistence on contradiction. The freedom they exalted was primarily the freedom of the individual, but most of the time as a *broken* individual. Not an individual fully and freely expressing him or herself, but rather an individual struggling, torn by contradiction, *inherently split*. Not a self-identical individual owning a rounded, sound personality, but an individual qua *pushed to his or her own limits*, to the innermost core of his or her being – a core that feels foreign and alien to the individual in question. Jean-Luc Godard likes Max Ophuls's *Caught* (1949) because its main character 'is finally well and truly caught after confusing love with what she thought was love and falling into traps she herself had set.'[96] Otto Preminger is commended because his main characters all choose a moral path and stubbornly follow it *all the way*, no matter what, without fearing contradictions and conflicts with themselves[97] – not too unlike Joan Fontaine in Alfred Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941):

> hair wild, face drawn, feeling that she might be happier and that it would be better to lose her husband than witness his inconstancies, resents feeling consideration and even love for him, resents feeling his arms hold her gently, offering him her mouth, exposing herself to danger without the secret desire to do so, wondering if she is loved enough. She prefers to grieve, to weep tears, to languish under offences, to consent to them, make an effort to yield her heart, be upset because she does so, weave an incalculable number of difficulties in the certainty of illuminating her doubts instead of living drearily with them.[98]

Speaking of suspicions and jealousy, *El* (1953) is the first film by Luis Buñuel that Truffaut likes, because, for the first time in his cinema, a madman is more moral than the 'normals'.[99]

95 Godard, '*Elena et les hommes*', p. 64.

96 Godard, '*Caught*'.

97 Rohmer, 'La souffrance de l'inventeur', p. 48. Paul Gégauff, a personal friend of Rohmer's and (partly) of the other éS/pda critics, is portrayed by Luc Moullet (while reviewing a film whose script had been written by Gégauff) in the exact same fashion. Luc Moullet, 'Nocive et heuruese'.

98 Godard, '*Strangers on a Train*', p. 25.

99 François Truffaut (unsigned), 'Une grande oeuvre: *El* de Buñuel'.

One way or another, freedom is always caught in a contradiction. Indeed, the emphasis the éS/pda puts on contradiction (inside the consciences of human beings as well as in societal rules they are expected to comply with) cannot be overstated. One of the greatest assets of *The Golden Coach* (*La Carosse d'or*, 1952) by Jean Renoir ('whoever knows Renoir knows that he is not a man to be bothered by his own contradictions'[100]) is that in this film

> it is not so much a question of denouncing the order as such – an easy and futile undertaking – as of revealing its necessary contradictions. If art is fundamentally moral, it is not because it reveals the path to abstract equality or liberty but because it glorifies the exception that is made possible only by the rule, and in a sense – as shocking as this idea may be – because it exalts the inequality of each person before destiny, or even salvation.[101]

The éS/pda's individualism exalts the individual – but only as the inevitable by-product of an inherently contradictory order. It is the necessary exception of a fundamentally incoherent rule, but *one wouldn't exist without the other*. Film (and art in general) is thus moral, insofar as it is capable of displaying contradiction. Accordingly, Rohmer rejects David Lean and applauds Nicholas Ray, because the latter enhances contradictions, whereas the former smooths them over.[102] He loathes Cecil B. De Mille because his adaptation of the Bible merely 'advertises God', that is, it shows off spectacular, powerful images that are also unfailingly shallow, but entirely ignores contradiction and conflict (thereby giving up the tragic).[103] But he praises Claude Chabrol's *Le beau Serge* (1958) because it is moral rather than moralizing;[104] what makes it so is the fact that the initial situation (the 'good' Parisian redeeming the 'bad', frustrated, country friend) is reversed as the film goes on (the latter becomes the redeemer, the former becomes the 'villain'), showing that contradiction does not belong to some idiosyncratically contradictory subject, but rather to the subject's (any subject's) situation *as such*, universally. Moreover, the éS/pda frequently valued not only contradictory movie characters, but also *auteurs* whose aesthetics

100 Rohmer, 'The American Renoir', p. 178.
101 Rohmer, 'Of Three Films and a Certain School', pp. 64-65.
102 Rohmer, 'Le pont de la rivière Kwai'.
103 Rohmer, 'Les dix commandements'.
104 Rohmer, 'Le beau Serge'.

are marked by contradiction, such as Max Ophuls, who shows things by means of hiding them.[105]

Is all this truly Kantian? Not exactly. True, for Kant, freedom is always caught in an original conflict with nature (qua exclusively ruled by cause-effect mechanisms) corresponding to what the German philosopher called the third antimony of pure reason, an antinomy that is 'solved', as it were, by the *practical* use of reason. However, what the éS/pda was really looking to was the area that emerged in the Kantian aftermath, and which sought to investigate the ambivalent relationships between freedom and necessity by 'dramatizing' this conflict. Thereby, 'necessity' could be embodied by nature as well as by destiny, the hostile order of society, etc. This loose but very fertile area is *the revival of ancient tragedy put forward by Goethe, Schelling, Schiller and the like*, all variously influenced by (and misinterpreting/re-appropriating) Kant. Faced with liberty and necessity, Goethe, Schelling, Schiller *et al.* provided various ways to intertwine these binary couples: 'Appropriations of tragedy around 1800 are efforts to grapple with the question of human freedom, a problem of central importance to post-Kantian thought. Idealist thinkers understand Greek tragedy to represent a distinctive form of human freedom, and to crystallize issues of agency and subjectivity that are central to their own philosophical enquiries.'[106]

Again, one of the main reasons behind this eclecticism is the fact that Rohmer wanted to go against Sartre and his existentialism (which, in turn, refused Kant), more than he wanted to fully and integrally embrace Kant's philosophy. By setting Kant, as well as the revival of ancient tragedy in his wake, against Sartre, Rohmer wanted to assert that freedom *is not groundless*: it indeed has a ground, as it is based on the conflict between it and its opposite (necessity). Such conflict begins within freedom itself, as the latter can only emerge against the background of universal reason. For Rohmer, in a Kantian vein, freedom is grounded in this *universal* conflict (which is why, for him, 'necessity' is an absolutely generic principle, and can have plenty of different faces: nature, society, etc.), as opposed to the

105 'Being aware of the indecency of "fabricating life", true artists resort to subterfuge; Ophuls's lies in masking that which he is showing to the point of concealing it from us. Hence the tulles and veils, the gates and fences [...] standing in the way between the action and the lens, between recreated life and us, who contemplate it with idleness.' Originally: 'Conscient de l'indécence qu'il y a à "fabriquer de la vie", l'artiste véritable recourt à des subterfuges; celui d'Ophuls est de masquer ce qu'il nous montre jusqu'au point de le dérober à notre vue. D'où ces tulles et ces voiles, ces grilles et grillages [...] qui s'interposent entre l'action et l'objectif, entre la vie recréé et nous qui oisivement la contemplons.' Truffaut, 'Lola au bûcher', pp. 28-29.

106 Billings, *Genealogy of the Tragic*, p. 6.

particularity of Sartrean *situation*. Moreover, because it is groundless and arbitrary, Sartre's freedom is bound to be perennially haunted by the ghost of its inherent impossibility: anguish. On the contrary, for Kant, freedom is actually possible precisely because it is a priori hindered by its opposite, by its inherent limits (in Sartre, only the freedom *of an Other* limits freedom instead).

It is worth repeating that we should by no means expect from the éS/pda (not even from Rohmer) a strict adherence to the manifold contortions of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, or to his other books on ethics. After all, those who came in the Kantian aftermath, and whose stances on tragedy and classicism substantially informed Rohmer's approach, all explored the aesthetic horizons disclosed by Kantian philosophy by *betraying* it.

> Though Kant is extremely circumspect about the possibilities his theory of aesthetic judgement opened, the subtlety and frequent ambiguity of the third Critique made it easy for his followers to breach some of the theoretical walls he had so carefully constructed. Sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, thinkers in the 1790s and in the 1800s enlarged the scope of Kant's vague notion of the philosophical significance of the beautiful into a philosophy of art, which could see artistic beauty as the instance of the rational and the divine within the sensible. It was Greek tragedy more than any other form that provided the ground and inspiration for this aesthetic turn in philosophy.[107]

This is why a high degree of flexibility is necessary in order to track down the influence exerted on Rohmer by Kant and those who came in his wake. References to Kantian ethics and ancient tragedy in the éS/pda written production are, as a rule, little more than generic and commonsensical witticisms; for instance, the fact that good and evil *follow* the moral law and not vice versa (one of the main tenets of Kantian ethics) is a distant *but nonetheless present* echo, in such passages as:

> Are we not right to salute a movie that dares to depart from the exigencies of life that make the beggar an accomplice of the very order that he denounces, and shows us that the answers are in us and only in us?[108]

107 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
108 Truffaut, '*Stalag 17*', p. 164.

> Being virtuous or good does not consist in conforming to the moral rules of our society. One does not become bad by way of contravening such rules. Therefore, if the ethical demand is interior and thereby hard to analyse, then nothing is simple anymore.[109]

Commonsensical as they may sound, these passages are nonetheless quite unambiguously non-Sartrean. And while reading the following lines, taken from Rohmer's analysis of Nicholas Ray's *Rebel without a Cause* (1955) as a faithful adaptation of the basic structure of classical tragedy ('A tragic hero is always in some sense a warrior awoken from the intoxication of battle, suddenly perceiving that he is a god no longer'[110]), one cannot help but feel that the critic is obliquely lashing out at the existentialist legacy (Camus in particular):

> The modern image of fate is no banal, stupid accident, like the one James Dean, the actor, died in at the height of his career. It is not the absurdity of chance, but of our condition or our will. It is the disproportion that exists between the measure of man – always a noble one – and the futility of the task that he often sets himself.[111]

In a similar vein, he elsewhere lamented that lately 'a vague sense of "failure" or of "absurdity" is generally offered as a substitute'[112] for the good old notion of 'destiny'. It can be argued, thus, that Rohmer reproached mid-century French literary milieu for not being up to its own premises. That is to say, he turned that milieu's own argument against itself, i.e. he countered Malraux's assertion (in his preface to the French edition of Faulkner's *Sanctuary*) that 'the novels of Faulkner are eruptions of Greek tragedy in the detective story' by claiming that nowadays Greek tragedy does not erupt in contemporary novels, but in those films who are more novelistic than the novel itself.

At the end of *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre announced his intention to write a treatise about ethics – which will never be published though (although some notebooks on the subject were posthumously released in 1983). The book of his that comes the closest to a treatise about

109 Chabrol, *Et pourtant, je tourne…*, p. 53. Originally: 'On n'est pas vertueux ou bon parce qu'on se conforme aux règlements de la morale de notre société. On n'est pas méchant parce qu'on contrevient à ces mêmes règlements. Dès lors, si l'exigence ethique est intérieure, donc difficilement analysable, plus rien n'est simple.'

110 Rohmer, 'Ajax or the Cid?', p. 114.

111 *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

112 Rohmer, 'Politics Against Destiny', p. 160.

ethics is *Saint Genet*, his biography of (and monograph on) Jean Genet. This habitual criminal who eventually turned to literature is the supremely moral writer, because it shows society (which likes to think of itself as moral) its own inherent immorality. He shows it that *everybody's* freedom is groundless.

> He carries to an extreme the latent, masked solitude which is ours; he inflates our sophism until they burst; he magnifies our failures to the point of catastrophe; he exaggerates our dishonesty to the point of making it intolerable to us; he makes our guilt appear in broad daylight. Whatever the society that succeeds ours, his readers will continue to declare him wrong, since he opposes *all* society.[113]

Importantly, Sartre also points out that Genet's ethics is inseparable from his aesthetics, that is, from his having turned to *writing*, viz. a tool whereby he, by exposing his own freedom, can address another person (the reader) and make her more aware and more responsible of her own freedom.

Without mentioning Sartre, Rohmer once did write about Genet.[114] He compared it to Caryl Chessman, a death row inmate who was also a writer. He said he preferred by far the latter in spite of his lack of literary expertise, because he was able to lucidly tackle the conflict between will and destiny without the slightest literary sophistication; in other words, he was able to acknowledge and vividly, if somewhat roughly, express the *exemplary* (that is, universal) value of his experience. As for Genet, his biggest charm was also his main drawback: the *exceptional* character of his experience, the rarity his way of writing underlines so much, to the detriment of its exemplary value, thereby 'shrunk' to the limited size of his own singularity. This, in turn, undermines Genet's main asset, viz. that of making morality face its own inherent immorality: precisely because his experience is so singular, immorality loses its 'inherent' character with regards to morality, whereas Chassman managed to keep that conflict in a purer, non-literarily-individualized form. Genet's emphasis is on subjective freedom rather than on its underlying, objective conflict.

For Sartre/Genet, the inherent immorality of morality lies in freedom's groundlessness: the only universality here is the arbitrariness whereby freedom and subjectivity (the for-itself consciousness) are constituted, an arbitrariness which thus can only be communicated 'in a literary way,' from a for-itself consciousness (the writer's) to another for-itself consciousness (the reader's), in an intersubjective game of musical chairs not unlike that

113 Sartre, *Saint Genet*, 598.

114 Rohmer, 'I. Le bandit philosophe', pp. 36-37.

between the for-itself consciousness and the Other in *Being and Nothingness*. For the éS/pda, behind the inherent immorality of morality *and before the subject's freedom* (*or intersubjectivity, for that matter*) *comes into play at all*, there is, above all, the universal conflict between will and destiny, grounding the impossibility and at the same time the possibility of freedom. In this respect, man is contradictory even before being free, and he is free *precisely* because he is contradictory (that is, because he escapes causality).

At the beginning of his review of *East of Eden* (Elia Kazan, 1955), François Truffaut laments the absence of a cinematic Jean Genet, that is, of a filmmaker capable to celebrate absolute evil while also being totally abject in real life. However, in spite of his personal attachment to the writer,[115] it is hard to take these lines seriously. More likely, they must be read (like so many statements by him) as a paradox, because he says that for the lack of a cinematic Genet one must regretfully content oneself with… Renoir, Lang, Hitchcock, Ophuls, Ray, Rossellini, Hawks and Kazan (that is, the very peak of the art of cinema in his view), who either dream to kill without actually killing (as in the case of the first three) or make films about crime without committing it (the others). Hence, his 'regret' should rather be read as follows: *there is no place* for a Genet in the cinema. There is no place for someone who addresses morality and immorality from the excessively narrow point of view of *his own exclusive self*. Before the subject and its freedom, a more basic conflict substantiates morality. Accordingly, he favourably welcomed *East of Eden*, 'the first film to have ever presented a Baudelairean hero, fascinated by vice and honours, and standing for both "family-I-love-you" and "family-I-hate-you" at the same time.'[116] Not so incidentally perhaps, Baudelaire was famously the object of an eponymous, somewhat scathing and almost outrageous critical study by Sartre himself.

5.4. Solitude morale

Sartre's 'game of musical chairs' between Self and Other, between the individual and society, each owning a subjective freedom and trying to objectify the other, can be discerned in other passages from *Saint Genet* – such as:

115 His biography confirms that between 1950 and 1964 they have been friends. De Baecque and Toubiana, *Truffaut: A Biography*, pp. 60-63.

116 Truffaut, 'Les haricots du mal', p. 40. Originally: 'Le premier film à nous présenter un héros baudelairien, fasciné par le vice et par les honneurs, qui famille je vous hais et famille je vous aime, en même temps.'

> one is alone when one is right and wrong *at the same time*: when one declares right as subject – because one is conscious and lives and because one cannot and will not deny what one has willed – and when one declares oneself wrong as object because one cannot reject the objective condemnation of society.[117]

No less important is the allusion to *solitude*: the last ten pages of *Saint Genet* explain the concept of solitude (also showing up here and there in earlier chapters of the book) and its ethical relevance.

'Solitude' is a crucial concept for the éS/pda as well, albeit one whose meaning is, in their case, distinctly non-Sartrean. To clarify this point, it is worth exploring John Hess's '*La politique des auteurs*: World view as aesthetics', one of the most significant and illuminating critical contributions on the éS/pda that ever appeared.[118] It starts by attacking Andrew Sarris and his vulgarization of the éS/pda, thanks to which auteurism penetrated American film culture. Sarris maintained that the éS/pda critics supported those directors who were able to react against the heavy constraints of a highly impersonal production system (Hollywood) and to express a personal worldview, by means of attaching a personal visual style to whatever story and subject matter they came across. Hess, on the contrary, thinks that stories did matter to them.

> Auteur criticism was, in fact, a very complicated way of saying something very simple. These critics wanted to see their own perception of the world on the screen: the individual is trapped in *solitude morale* and can escape from it—transcend it—if he or she come to see their condition and then extend themselves to others and to God. Whenever the auteur critics saw this tale on the screen, they called its creator an auteur.[119]

In other words, the éS/pda critics thought that there was only one story worth being brought up on the screen. Of course, it is not just 'one single story', but a *pattern* that can inform countless stories: *solitude morale* ('moral solitude'). Stories of this kind generally feature a man or a woman being trapped in his or her own particularities, peculiarities and idiosyncrasies:

117 Sartre, *Saint Genet*, p. 592.

118 Hess, '*La politique des auteurs*'. This is the first half of a two-part essay. Its follow-up ('*La politique des auteurs* 2, Truffaut's manifesto') is far less relevant to our purpose, and will thus not be considered. All subsequent references are taken from the online version of the article, available here: http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC01folder/auturism1.html.

119 Hess, '*La politique des auteurs*'.

'This tale begins with a man or a woman, the social animal, trapped in a state of *solitude morale* because he or she is neither in touch with his or her lowest human depths, nor with other people, nor with the spiritual dimension of life.' Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951), Roberto Rossellini's *Europe 51* (1952), Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* (1954) (three films among those most valued by the éS/pda), all begin with a solitary figure, whose utter isolation is also underlined visually. 'As the tale develops, we find that under extreme, even violent circumstances, the hero is forced to discover his most base and humiliating aspects; he has reached the point at which his relationship to other people and ultimately to God becomes clear to him and to the audience as well.' This occurs in all three films (in *Johnny Guitar*, for instance, the main character faces his own penchant for violence and transcends it by engaging with his former lover Vienna), and somewhat graphically in *Stromboli*, as has already been analysed in a previous chapter. In short, what these critics were after was 'a narrative movement from *solitude morale*, to self-revelation, and, finally, to salvation either in terms of contact with others (*Johnny Guitar*) or in terms of contact with the divine (*Europe 51*).'

Any in-depth exploration of the hundreds of articles authored by these critics would easily confirm that *solitude morale* was indeed frequently mentioned in their writings. Most notably, as suggested by the release dates of the three aforementioned films, it was definitely more recurrent in the éS years than in the pda ones – although there is no doubt that even in its maturest phase the pda bore substantial traces of the *solitude morale* approach. These critics wanted to see films that followed the moral torments of an individual that cannot help but be played against the community;[120]

120 Michel Dorsday elaborates lengthily on this topic in his 'Situation de l'Amérique'. As for Hess (who does not distinguish between éS and pda), he explains the éS/pda's bias towards individualism in historical terms. The scholar claims that the éS/pda originated from the young but very fertile tradition in film criticism that existed in France in the years immediately prior to and immediately after the end of World War II. This tradition (whose main exponent was André Bazin, future editor-in-chief of the *CC*) was obviously deeply marked by the devastations of the war and by the subsequent need for reconstruction. Accordingly, Bazin, Astruc, Leenhardt and the others practised a socially-oriented kind of film criticism, which due to the heavy influence of (among others) Sartrean existentialism and Mounier's *personnalisme* greatly valued the freedom of the individual, but only qua situated in a definite social context. They were not interested in the free individual per se, but in the individual qua free agent well inserted within a community, reacting to it and handling 'responsibly' one's freedom for the sake of the others (which also explains, according to Hess, why Bazin was so fond of visual techniques emphasizing the organic relationship between the person and the environment, like the long take or the depth of field). Conversely, the next generation, i.e. that of the éS/pda, felt the effect of the political climate of the late 1940s, when France's reactionary turn abruptly headed off

the solitude they show 'belongs to the exceptional being, or someone that circumstances made into one, the solitude of a genius, not of an outcast or a failure';[121] in Ray's films 'salvation is a private affair,' as 'the real struggle takes place in only one.'[122] In *Stalag 17* by Billy Wilder (1953), 'an apologia of individualism,' Sefton, the main character, '*is alone because he wants to be alone*,' he is very intelligent but refuses to be the leader of the prisoners (the film is set in an Austrian war camp during World War II), and 'escapes to get away from the companions whom he despises rather than from a regime he has come to terms with and guards he's been able to bend to his needs. Sefton needs those whom he despises to despise him in turn. If he remains, he will be a hero-a role he rejects no matter what the cost. Having lost his moral solitude, he hastens to regain it by becoming an escapee, with all the risk that entails.' It is important that Truffaut also makes clear that 'the depravity of the group versus the individual's moral solitude' is 'a *large* theme [*le grand sujet de l'époque*]'[123] (my emphasis): his is not the only review gathering together the pda's favourite *auteurs* on the basis of a *thematic* connection. The éS/pda attachment to the *solitude morale* pattern is most likely due to the fact that they regarded it as the modern variation of the old dilemma of ancient tragedy: freedom vs. necessity. In an article that Hess also quotes,[124] Rivette stated that directors as different as Hitchcock, Renoir and Rossellini shared the same set of basic *themes*: sacrifice, renunciation, abandonment.[125] What he had in mind, though, is clearly *solitude morale*, as in the immediately preceding

post-war hopes of renovation. As a result, they still focussed on individual freedom, but the underlying conception of the individual was altogether different: their individual was *isolated*, deprived of significant bonds with surrounding social environment. Their individualism was thus much more apolitical, if not downright conservative. Hess is quite right when he points out that the éS/pda broke away from the existentialist/personalist framework of the former critics. He fails, however, to satisfyingly outline the contours of their rejection of Sartre, leaving them vague.

121 Rohmer, 'Of Three Films and a Certain School', p. 61.

122 Rivette, 'On imagination'.

123 Truffaut, '*Stalag 17*', pp. 163-164. Decisively, Truffaut openly affirms that he *never* liked *any* of Wilder's films before – and the reason why he likes *Stalag 17* is because Wilder has finally come up with a cleverly individualistic tale. This confirms the suspicion that the éS/pda is less about praising every film by a random list of beloved filmmakers than it is about praising those works which conform to a certain *specific* idea of cinema.

124 Here is a few other reviews that mention *solitude morale* and that Hess does not quote (the list could go on and on): Truffaut, 'De A Jusqu'au Z'; Truffaut, '*Rear Window*'; Truffaut, 'La fureur de vivre'; Rohmer, 'Deux images de la solitude'.

125 Elsewhere, he similarly points out that a common thread strings together several films by Murnau, Rossellini, Renoir, Hitchcock, Griffith, Ophuls and a few others, namely an 'abstract bend [...] guiding the steps of the heroes from town to solitude' ('[une] courbe abstraite [...] qui dirige de la ville à la solitude les pas des héros'). Rivette, 'La masque', p. 50.

paragraph he wrote (about Hitchcock's *I, Confess*, 1953): 'Never before had a story with so many wrung hearts, with such total dependence, been so closely confused with the experience of solitude, which suffocates the human being at the very moment when it acknowledges the evidence of its ties.'[126] Here, as in Hess's formulation, *solitude morale* consists of the discovery of others and/or God the very moment one's solitude is taken to the extreme. Nicholas Ray is another apt case in point. 'All his films tell the same story: the violent man who wants to renounce violence and his relationship with a morally stronger woman. Ray's constant hero, the bully, is a weak man-child, when he is not simply a child. He is wrapped in moral solitude, always hunted, sometimes lynched.'[127] To claim that, for these critics, not only 'all Ray's films', but *all the films worthy of consideration* told the story of *solitude morale* would be an overstatement (one not unlike Godard's slogan 'the cinema is Nicholas Ray'[128]), but only slightly so. The *auteur* cherished by the éS/pda was not necessarily someone who expressed by means of a personal style whatever vision he happened to carry, nor was he just any director reiterating film after film whatever 'same story' happened to constitute his 'personal poetics', but if somebody proved capable of convincingly grappling with *that one single pattern* (the *solitude morale*), so reminiscent of the binary deadlock of ancient tragedy, then, in all likelihood, he would have been granted the *auteur* status as a matter of course. Maybe not every single *auteur* told the story of *solitude morale*, and not every single director tackling that subject matter automatically became an *auteur* – but it certainly helped a lot.

In order to understand what *solitude morale* really was about, one needs to consider the formal dimension as well. What follows is Hess's definition of what Godard (and by extension the éS/pda) meant by *mise en scène*.

> Godard's definition of *mise en scene*, admittedly a loose one, suggests three areas of inquiry. First, there is the demand that film represent and not express. Second, Godard emphasizes the genius of the director and posits an 'inseparability' of director and camera. Third, and most important, Godard centers on the 'movement of the actor within the frame.' Thus *mise en scene*, for Godard, consisted of the way of presenting the material, the relation of the artist to the material, and the functioning of the actor.[129]

126 Rivette, 'L'art de la fugue', p. 49. Originally: 'Jamais trame d'âmes plus serrée, plus totale dépendance n'avaient été aussi étroitement confondues avec l'expérience de la solitude, qui étouffe l'être au moment même oú il constate l'évidence de ses liens.'

127 Truffaut, '*Johnny Guitar*', p. 141.

128 Godard, '*Bitter Victory*', p. 64.

129 Hess, '*La politique des auteurs*'.

This definition is frankly unsatisfying. Unlike Hess's very useful concept of *solitude morale*, this tripartition does not really stand the test of a thorough exploration of the éS/pda's hundreds of writings: by carefully analysing these articles, one easily finds that too many nuances of the extremely elusive concept of *mise en scène* are left out. However, what indeed should be retained from it is a shared, implicit principle underlying all three entries: *a peculiar reversal between the inside and the outside*. 'The demand that film represent and not express' clearly rests upon the manifestation/expression divide previously outlined; the 'inseparability of director and camera' suggests that there should be no 'authorial intentions' but in the manifest content of the images; the 'movement of the actor within the frame' points to the fact that 'the director must examine the appearance in order to penetrate to the essence, the inner life.'[130] More generally, 'the auteur critics posited a direct connection between the human body and *la vie intérieure* (inner moral and spiritual life). What one sees on the movie screen is the external manifestations, the presentation, of the interior life.'[131] The important word here is 'direct': the connection is immediate, there is no 'inside' being expressed *through* the 'outside', or through literary techniques. This is why Rohmer praised *Bitter Victory* (1957): its director 'was here less trying to suggest through rhetorical devices the heroes' thoughts than he was to find within the image itself the lyrical transcription of an inner turmoil.'[132] Cinema, 'descriptive in essence, only excels through the expression of a very inner tragedy, that is to say, of our inability to give away our dearest thoughts.'[133] Only *outward appearance* can deliver the innermost core of our thought. Rohmer exalted Kenji Mizoguchi's *Chikamatsu monogatari* (*The Crucified Lovers*, 1954) because it showed the characters' feelings thanks to a dusty mountainous path, or a boat floating on lake waters.[134] And although he disliked Vincente Minnelli's *Tea and Sympathy* (1956), he did appreciate the few moments that focused less on the teenage hero's psychological awkwardness than on the downright bodily manifestations thereof (for instance when he clumsily attempts to dance with a much more experienced

130 *Ibid.*

131 *Ibid.*

132 Rohmer, 'Seul film adulte à Venise: *Amère victoire*'. Originally: '[Il] a cherché, ici, moins à suggérer par quelque procédé rhétorique les pensées de ses héros, qu'à trouver, dans l'image, la transcription lyrique d'un tourment intérieur.'

133 Rohmer, 'La robe bleue d'Harriett', p. 63. Originally: 'Par essence descriptif, [il] n'excelle que dans l'expression d'un tragique tout intérieur, je veux dire de notre inaptitude à livrer le plus cher de nos pensées.'

134 Rohmer, 'Les amants crucifiés'.

bartender).[135] 'The cinema will excel in portraying sentiments only as long as they come from the incessant connections with things, and [...] – *these sentiments being things themselves* – they will become nothing more than the movement or the mimicry that they impose on us at each instant'[136] (my emphasis).

We can now reformulate the pattern of *solitude morale* with more accuracy. A man or a woman is trapped in her own particularities, and is thereby isolated. A path of self-discovery through her own contradictions begins; she is pushed to the limits of her own personality, until she is compelled to face her own self *qua foreign*. The revelation that she is an alien to herself coincides with the reversal between the inside and the outside: the innermost core of her being proves to be *external* (that is, it is immediately revealed on outward appearance) as much as the others and/or God prove to be inside her. When the hero of *Strangers on a Train* finally resolves to kill, his looks *manifest* this intention rather than *expressing* it, because the appearance of that intention on the outside *clashes with* whatever characterization the character had hitherto been given. At that moment, the hero is, as it were, beyond his own limits, and his looks manifest this 'beyond': 'The signifier and the signified are here set so high [...] that in the exploits of this criminal, Hitchcock's art cannot but show us the promethean image of his murderous little hand, his terror in face of the unbearable brilliance of the fire it steals.'[137]

Gestures such as that by the hero of *Strangers on a Train* do not 'express' interior life: they only manifest an opacity which is *as mysterious as* interior life – therein lies their coincidence between the inside and the outside. 'The transparency of gesture comes from an initial opacity, suggesting the mystery of interior life that three centuries of novelistic investigation have still left us unable to penetrate.'[138] The legibility of the outside depends on the utter, complete impenetrability of the inside; it is not a sign of what lies within interiority once its mystery has been penetrated. Again, one only needs to look at *Stromboli* to find a neat depiction of this pattern: in her hour of utmost despair, when the clash between her and the others has reached the point of no return, Karin is reduced to her most exterior manifestations; devoid of any inner life, she *is* like the rabbit and the tuna. *Solitude morale* is not just the tale of an individualist soul going through the hardships of isolation: it is also and inseparably the tale of the reversal between the

135 Rohmer, 'Thé et sympathie'.
136 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 46.
137 Godard, 'Strangers on a Train', p. 24.
138 Rohmer, 'The American Renoir', p. 181.

inside and the outside. Renoir's 1946 *Diary of a Chambermaid* not only 'depicts the kinds of feelings we like to bury in the depths of our soul – not just feelings of repressed humiliation, but even the distaste or weariness we feel toward ourselves,' but also 'depicts them [...] limpidly':[139] there are no 'depths of soul' any longer, because their outward, 'limpid' objectification is all there is. This is shown, in the same film, particularly by 'the savage clash between the robust servant and the consumptive master, that show us, in a flash, a world of secrets that until then had only been glimpsed."[140]

This reversal between inside and outside, alluded to in many passages in the writings by the éS/pda (for instance: 'But the cinema will always call for this enclosed, dark place where the spectator withdraws and concentrates: an inner art, therein everything gathers and condenses together; before long, the screen seems to be standing at the very centre of the mind; on it, I contemplate the universe in the innermost part of myself"[141]), can be found in documentaries as well. One of them is *Stars at Noon* (*Les Etoiles de midi*, 1959) by Marcel Ichac, a mountaineering film which 'introduces the modern notions of continuity and duration."[142]

> In this battle between man and gravity, the obstacle that seems the most difficult to overcome is not space but *time*, that is, the long and tedious repetition of each movement, the bearer of a more subtle vertigo than that caused by heights. Little by little, through the intervention of time, we perceive the futility, the vanity, and at the same time the true glory of the undertaking, the rare pleasure it brings. Thanks to time, we enter these men's souls, and the suspense, which is physical in the beginning, becomes psychological and moral in the end. In devoting itself to painting a rare passion, this film allows us to touch the common foundation of all passions.[143]

Here, Rohmer seems to imply that cinema can access 'the common foundation of all passions,' that is, *time as such* according to Kant himself. The 'form of inner sense, i.e. of the intuiting we do of ourselves and of our inner state"[144]

139 *Ibid.*, p. 180.
140 *Ibid.*, p. 181.
141 Rivette, 'Les malheurs d'Orphée', p. 2. Originally: 'Mais toujours le cinéma réclamera ce lieu clos et obscur où le spectateur se replie sur soi-même et se concentre: art intérieur, tout s'y rassemble et s'y condense; l'écran semble bientot s'être dressé au centre même de l'esprit; j'y contemple l'univers au plus secret de moi-même.'
142 Rohmer, 'Faith and Mountains: *Les Etoiles de midi*', p. 119.
143 *Ibid.*
144 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A33.

(Kant's definition of time) is of course not accessed in itself (a possibility Kant firmly denied), but becomes outward and spatialized; thereby, passions become something external, the inside becomes the outside (and in turn, the outside – the spatialized depiction of passions – *moves* us, affecting the viewer in the inside). In the passage above, this process is straightforwardly called *moral*.

Direction of actors, arguably an unjustly overlooked means to put together *mise en scène* the way the éS/pda meant it,[145] is obviously of paramount importance when it comes to this reversal between the inside and the outside. It was particularly important when, rather than expressing some psychological content, it manifested *contradictions*: no definite meaning, but a dynamic tension between possible meanings. 'The hesitation of both brother and sister, between the temptations of semi-prostitution and the call of a love affair and of a vocation (portrayed with no less plausible coldness), is depicted with such precision, such accuracy of detail [...].'[146] Here, Rohmer is talking about René Clément, a filmmaker he usually does not like, but who in this particular film (*Barrage contre le Pacifique*, 1957) at least aptly directs his actors. The critic unhesitatingly calls *moral* his capacity to manifest contradiction through the players' way of acting. Elsewhere, he defines *mise en scène* as the art 'of refining characters which in the script appear to be rather rough'; in other words, it is the art of visually emphasizing the characters' contradiction, 'the very definition of tragedy, in accordance with Aristotle's norms.'[147] Along the same lines, according to Godard 'Murnau's *Faust* also revealed this incessant change in which the actor transcends his powers, taxes his senses, falls prey to a torrent of emotions in which extravagance yields to calm, jealousy becomes aversion, ambition becomes failure, and pleasure, remorse.'[148] What is at stake in all these cases is not the expression of a definite feeling, but the manifestation of a grey area

145 Jacques Rivette, for instance, maintains that 'one of the subtlest kinds [of genius][...] is to be able to bestow it on one's young girls'. Originally: 'Une des formes [de génie] les plus subtiles [...] est d'en savoir donner à ses jeunes filles'. Here Rivette is referring to Boris Barnet, whom he considers a genius also because he can transmit his genius to his young actresses. Rivette, 'Un nouveau visage de la pudeur', p. 50.

146 Rohmer, 'Barrage contre le pacifique'. Originally: 'La peinture des hésitations de ce frère et de cette soeur entre les tentations d'une semi-prostitution et l'appel d'un amour et d'une vocation regardés avec une non moins vraisemblable froideur, est menée avec une telle précision, une telle justesse de détail [...].'

147 Eric Rohmer, 'Livres de cinéma', *CC*, 62, p. 57. Originally: '[...] de nuancer des caractères, souvent frustes sur le script'; 'La définition même de la tragédie conformément aux normes d'Aristote.'

148 Godard, '*Strangers on a Train*', p. 25.

beyond definition, and in between (often opposite) feelings: ultimately, these feelings cannot be determined *but* by their outward concretion as such.

Haroun Tazieff's *The Devil's Blast* (*Les rendez-vous du diable*, 1959) is, according to the review Godard dedicated to it, a fascinating borderline case of *solitude morale*, one putting 'into practice Lenin's famous maxim as codified by Gorky: ethics are the aesthetic of the future.'[149] Its director had himself filmed while walking very dangerously close to the edge of a volcano; that scene alone, Godard says, 'would suffice to make *Les rendez-vous du diable* a remarkable film [the original article in French reads: *le plus beau film du monde* ('the best film in the world')]. For two reasons. One refers to Tazieff himself, the other to the cinema itself'.[150] The first reason is that Tazieff pushes himself to his limits:

> An absurd and fine endeavour inasmuch as it determinedly resists analysis: as absurd and fine as the silence of Rimbaud, absurd and fine as the death of Drieu la Rochelle, absurd and fine as the voyage of Abel, who came on foot from Oslo to Paris to show Cauchy the formula for resolving quintic equations, only Cauchy refused to receive him, and Abel returned to Norway where he spent the rest of his life proving that it was impossible to resolve quintic equations by formula.[151]

All these 'gloriously contradictory' occurrences are so many epitomes of *solitude morale*, and although *Les rendez-vous du diable* is only a documentary, it is still the tale of an individual possessed by a private obsession, namely that of defying the limits imposed by nature. This obsession is pushed to its limits: Tazieff risks his own life to film volcanoes. It is thus no impersonal 'documentary on extreme situations' like the much-despised *Lost Continent*[152] (*Continente Perduto*, Enrico Gras, Giorgio Moser and Leonardo Bonzi, 1955), but well and truly a *solitude morale* tale, and precisely like all *solitude morale* tales, this individualist obsession has to make it to the outside and be reduced to outward appearance, to the mere surface of images. The inside/outside reversal has to take place – and this is the 'second reason' Godard mentions.

> By filming himself risking death from streams of lava, Tazieff proves the cinema – if I may so put it – by the simple fact that without the film, the adventure would be of no interest, since no one but Tazieff would

149 Godard, 'Les rendez-vous du diable', p. 125.
150 *Ibid.*
151 *Ibid.*
152 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

> know it had happened in this way. What is remarkable, therefore, is this overweening desire to record, this fierce purpose which Tazieff shares with a Cartier-Bresson or the Sucksdorff of *The Great Adventure*, this deep inner need which forces them to try, against all odds, to authenticate fiction through the reality of the photographic image.[153]

Of course, this is not a matter of merely 'documenting heroism,' but rather of a tight interconnection between reality and fiction. This means, in short, that the outside world is supposed to display on its visible surface *by itself* the very stuff fiction 'in the mind of men' is made of: Tazieff shows us 'the underwater eruption of the Azores volcano with its wealth of forms so awesome that only Tintoretto could have dared paint it,' as well as 'a river of lava writhing in a boiling mass of purple and gold, colours which only Eisenstein dared use in the banquet scene of *Ivan the Terrible*.'[154] In this way, the reconciliation between *solitude morale* individual (here: Tazieff) and the others and/or God is not even needed, because what is truly important, pace Hess, is not that reconciliation per se, but the 'vertiginous moment' of reversal between the inside and the outside (a reversal whose importance was, after all, recognized by Hess himself). Neither the others, nor God really need to be around.

5.5. The vertiginous moment: The reversal between inside and outside

Here, we touch on a particularly important point. Hess's claim that in the end the *solitude morale* character reconciles with God and the others might be the weakest part of his argument. There is indeed a reconciliation in most cases, but it is one of a different kind. One of the reasons why *solitude morale* pattern is to be conceived as the modern version of ancient tragedy is that the 'illumination on the screen of a privileged moment when all barriers to the expression of long forgotten or repressed feelings came down' that Hess calls 'the vertiginous moment' is in fact somewhat similar to Aristotle's *catharsis*: the powerful release of passions whereby the audience was faced, through fiction, with freedom's inherent dead-ends (this very awareness created in turn the possibility for freedom to be actually exerted *off stage*, within the community, in civic everyday life). 'Catharsis', in the *solitude*

153 *Ibid.*
154 *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

morale pattern, is the moment when the self is discovered as foreign: it is the vertiginous moment of the reversal between inside and outside. It is the moment when the hero(ine) and/or the audience finds his/her self fully disclosed in external appearance. Freedom rejoins necessity in that it finds itself *spatialized*. It is also worth noting that *solitude morale*'s decisive 'vertiginous moment', the reversal between outside and inside, is precisely the opposite of a temporalization, as it occurs (definitely not unlike catharsis classically conceived) all at once, simultaneously and discontinuously (and not, say, by carefully interweaving the psychological causalities and determinism originating one's attitude and behaviour). 'These critics were not interested in the conventional psychological inner workings so typical of the usual stage play or novel; they were in search of a special moment,'[155] particularly the moment when the character and/or the actor seemingly loses control and is revealed through his or her outward manifestations without expressing anything definite. Ingrid Bergman (Karen) on the volcano is once again an excellent case in point, as are, say, the sudden outbursts characterizing Nicholas Ray's heroes, the priest under stress in *I, Confess*, the subtly naturalistic acting of so many performers directed by Jean Renoir, and so on and so forth.

This is why neither the others, nor God were needed in *Les rendez-vous du diable*: the visual depiction of the conflict between will (Tazieff's) and destiny (nature) is already its own cathartic conciliation. And it is again Godard who offered another particularly suitable example, in a ciné-club note about Fritz Lang's *The Return of Frank James* (1940). After having outlined its narrative in a way that closely matches the *solitude morale* pattern, i.e. the contemporary version of ancient tragedy's deadlock ('Most of Lang's scripts are built in the same way: chance forces a character to leave his individualistic shell and become a tragic hero, in that he "forces the hand" of an abruptly imposed fate'[156]), he goes on to make clear that ultimately the tragic must be made visible on the very surface of the images:

> One image alone could define the aesthetics of Fritz Lang: a policeman targets a bandit and is ready to kill him; to better emphasise the inexorable aspect of such scene, Lang installed a front sight on the gun, like

155 Hess, '*La politique des auteurs*'.

156 Godard, 'Le retour de Frank James', p. 92. Originally: 'Tous les scénarios de Lang sont construits de la même façon: le hasard force un personnage à sortir de sa coquille d'individualiste et à dévenir un héros tragique dans la mesure où il "force la main" au destin qui lui est brusquement imposé.'

> those from high precision weapons; then, the spectator instantly feels that the policeman *cannot* miss his shot and that the runaway needs to *mathematically* die.[157]

The fact that the image is viewed through a gun sight does not really 'say' or 'express' anything: it just *anticipates* something that is about to happen. It is not a matter of some meaning being expressed, but rather of time being compressed. Fate lies in this contraction (it is the timeless dimension of destiny entering the temporal dimension of men). Appearance for appearance's sake is the quintessence of the entanglement between freedom and necessity that tragedy is fundamentally about: the inside becomes the outside, time becomes space. According to Rohmer, in Murnau's films, tragic conflict appears through the relationship between the characters and their environment: natural elements in *Tabu* (1931) and *Sunrise* (1927), architectural infrastructures in *Tartuffe* (1925) and *The Last Laugh* (*Der Letzte Mann*, 1924); in *Faust*, it is mainly conveyed thanks to the dichotomies (inside/outside, high/low and others) shaping the directions of gestures and the spaces wherein they are inscribed.[158] Crucially, as has already been noted about *The Wrong Man* earlier in this chapter, all this points to no definite content being expressed, but at *a conflict* being manifested spatially. In Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn* (1949), *I Confess* and *The Wrong Man*, 'man is not the driving element. It is not fate, either, in the meaning that the Greeks gave it, but, rather, the very shapes that the formal entities space and time acquire."[159]

Indeed, in the éS/pda's (and especially Rohmer's) view, time and space not only manifest the tragic, but *replace* it. In films, the tragic takes shape in purely spatial and temporal forms, to such an extent that the narrative forms and structures of ancient, classical tragedy *are not necessarily needed* – which is also why ancient tragedy can be now smoothly transformed into the formally fairly different *solitude morale* pattern. As far as narrative is concerned, Anthony Mann's *The Last Frontier* (1956) is not a tragedy: it is novelistic, lyrical and Shakespearian. Nature is not part of the tragic

157 *Ibid.* Originally: 'Une image pourrait à elle seule définir l'esthétique de Fritz Lang: un policier ajuste un bandit qui s'enfuit et va le tuer; pour mieux faire sentir l'aspect inexorable de la scène, Lang fit installer sur le fusil un viseur à lunette comme en ont les armes de grande précision; le spectateur sent alors immédiatement que le policier *ne peut pas* manquer son coup et que le fuyard doit *mathématiquement* mourir.'

158 This is the main thesis of Rohmer's monograph *L'organisation de l'espace dans le* Faust *de Murnau*.

159 Rohmer, 'Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*', p. 169.

conflict, but a mere accompaniment to a drama that 'does not spring from the conflict of two wills, each led by its own logic, but rather from two, or many, ways of being, each of which embodying, so to speak, a monologue being delivered for lack of finding a common language.'[160] However, tragic conflict is not simply ruled out: necessity (tragedy's backbone, as it were) takes shape through the 'mathematical', 'algebraic' and 'geometric' character of Mann's *mise en scène*, which Rohmer analyses in detail[161] by retracing the lines being drawn within the frames by the actors' movements and by the dynamical use of landscape, as well as outside the frames thanks to sound. The resulting geometric figures (in this case, a triangle) embody necessity, thereby retrieving tragedy[162] in a different fashion; as George Lellis once put it, Rohmerian cinematic metaphysics 'converts geometry to morality.'[163]

A good case in point here is Marcel Carné, a director almost unanimously despised by the éS/pda; Michel Dorsday, for instance, frontally opposed pseudo-tragic Carné and Orson Welles' *Othello* (1952),[164] saying that the solitude of Carné's tragic characters is only social, while Welles' solitude is portrayed in ways that unmistakably recall *solitude morale*. Rohmer admired him in the late Thirties and in the early Forties, but did not like his subsequent films; at any rate, he also said that Carné never really featured among his favourites.[165] It is easy to realize that his most celebrated films rely heavily on the tragic. *Daybreak* (*Le jour se lève*, 1939), for instance, is very classically constructed following the traditional structure of ancient tragedy, and neatly revolves around the conflict between necessity and freedom. However, Carné's tragic is essentially *theatrical*, as shown by the rigid dramatic structure and by the way its over-written dialogues are uttered. Rohmer once said that it is not enough to transpose *Romeo and Juliet* to another historical era and another place to satisfyingly adapt it for the screen;[166] similarly, it is not enough to transpose ancient tragedy to twentieth century's Aubervilliers and to keep its textual and dramatic features intact

160 Rohmer, 'Le roi des montagnes', p. 38. Originally: '[Il] ne nait pas du conflit de deux volontés, chacune entrainée par sa propre logique, mais plutôt, de deux, ou plusieurs, manières d'être, aimant de soliloquer faute de trouver un commun langage.'

161 Rohmer, 'Le roi des montagnes', p. 39.

162 Rohmer does not use this exact word here, but the way he describes the film recalls many other occurrences where he does employ that term.

163 Lellis, *Bertolt Brecht,* Cahiers du Cinéma *and Contemporary Film Theory*, p. 17.

164 Dorsday, '*Othello* ou la solitude de notre temps'.

165 Rohmer, 'Le temps des reprises'; see also Rohmer, 'The Critical Years', pp. 13-14.

166 Rohmer, 'Ciel sans étoiles', p. 5.

without providing a *spatial*, non-theatrical (that is, not centred around the main character[167]) equivalent of the tragic.

It thus appears that, in a way, *solitude morale* brings together the two aspects of cinematic freedom hitherto accounted for: the formal one as well as the thematic one (tragedy). Most of all, it seems to be the confutation of the anguish haunting Sartre's freedom: *first*, the hero suffers an isolation deriving from the arbitrariness of his self-chosen singularities, but *then* the hero gets to the very bottom of them and finds out that his freedom is in fact grounded on its opposite. This is the moment of 'cathartic' reconciliation; at this point, the hero's freedom is definitively no longer liable to be read in Sartrean terms, and starts to faintly look like Kant's moral autonomy. Of course, this does not mean that these films overtly suggested in any recognizable way that, as per Kant, universal reason is the very condition of free will, and that the latter can only be formulated in accordance with the moral law. It just means that the hero's self-imposed freedom loses the groundlessness it seemed to be affected by in the beginning, and is reconciled with its *inherent* limitations. In very generic, but nonetheless actual terms, the inside is reconciled with the outside as it acknowledges itself *qua external* and fully coincident with appearances. As the mechanical determinism of the temporal unfolding of the cause-effect texture known as narrative is perturbed in some way and thereby approaches tragedy (the latter being typically characterized by the traumatic irruption of fate or Gods in the regular deployment of meaningful, oriented and concatenated human action), appearance for appearance's sake fills up these temporal fissures: in these cathartic moments, time is made into space, the inside becomes the outside. Once again, this catharsis has to do with Kant's critique of Descartes (and, by anticipation, Sartre): it is the liberating revelation that there is no self accessible in itself through self-reflection, but only in outward apperception itself (it is the purely formal 'I think' accompanying every apperception). As the inside and the outside switch places, the viewer himself feels *involved* in the outward appearance before him.[168]

167 In a long and detailed analytical piece ('Le décor est un acteur'), André Bazin demonstrated that *Daybreak* contained a lot of interaction between the hero and the objects surrounding him (a wardrobe, a glass and so on and so forth); however, the same piece also made clear that everything revolved around the hero, who always remained the firm pivot of the film's spatial organization. Elsewhere, Bazin himself said that theatrical space is essentially centripetal; therefore we must conclude that *Daybreak* was in effect theatrical.

168 In his anti-Bergsonian *Intuition of the Instant*, Gaston Bachelard claims that the reality of time does not lie in duration (as Bergson maintained), but in the instant disrupting it; continuity is not the primary law of time, because it is itself ruled, regulated and determined by discontinuity, time's

Not infrequently, Rohmer tended to associate 'appearance for appearance's sake' with morality and with the involvement of the viewer in what was to be seen. In other words, beauty was regarded as an antidote to the smugness toward negativity, to the cynicism and to the resignation to alienation allegedly characterizing French 'tradition of quality' films, indulgently depicting moral and/or physical ugliness so as to make the viewer feel smarter. As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, he deemed *The Trouble with Harry* as the opposite of Clouzot's cynicism; in the same review, this very feature was directly connected with the visual beauty of the film's landscapes.

The Criminal Life of Archibaldo De La Cruz (*Ensayo de un crimen*, 1955) is the first film by Luis Buñuel that Rohmer really likes: he claims it to be his first film where the director does not despise his characters. Crucially, Rohmer pairs the fact that Buñuel is here 'the lovable accomplice of his lovable hero'[169] with the film's pictorial merits.

> This modern set, with its unctuous blacks and whites, its baroque knick-knacks, its sophisticated dresses, and magnificent undergrowth in its final scene, counts for a great deal in the fascination, with which the display of imaginary or real, sumptuous and scintillating murders attracts us, like a jeweller's window display. After all, who cares about the symbol's significance? What we see satisfies a hunger that is essentially too delicate to be unhealthy. Therein, I believe, lies the true moral of the fable.[170]

fundamental feature. Or, as Godard (who once mentioned 'the late Gaston Bachelard' in his '*L'eau vive*', p. 80) put it, by means of a turn of phrase owing a lot to Bachelard's lyrical assertiveness, 'space is the impulse of a desire, and time its effort towards accomplishment' ('*Strangers on a Train*', p. 25): temporal continuity is nothing but the development of a direction imposed by discontinuity. To be sure, this is not exactly (to put it mildly) a Rohmerian/Kantian conception, but it is nonetheless striking that the discontinuity of the instant in time (as time's foundation itself) is matched with *solitude* throughout Bachelard's treatise. What follows can be read in the very first paragraph: 'The instant is already solitude [...] It is solitude in its barest metaphysical value. Yet, an even more poignant solitude confirms the tragic solitude of the instant: through a sort of creative violence, time limited to the instant isolates us not only from others but even from ourselves, since it breaks with our most cherished past'. And in the last paragraph of a later essay ('Poetic Instant and Metaphysical Instant') included in the appendix of the same volume, it is claimed that '*all morality is instantaneous*. The categorical imperative of morality has nothing to do with duration. It does not retain any sensory cause; it anticipates no consequence'. This convergence between (tragic) solitude, morality, temporal discontinuity, inner conflict, the disruption of causal sequentiality and (last but not least) Kant's categorical imperative itself intriguingly resonates with *solitude morale*'s reliance on temporal/causal discontinuity, as the only real foundation of the reversal between the inside and the outside, the catharsis of the individual at odds with the others, and with himself.

169 Rohmer, 'Luis Buñuel: The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz', p. 148.

170 *Ibid.*

What the critic is getting at, is an intriguing parallelism between the *graciousness* of visual appearances and the paradoxical *innocence* of a character who is innocent ('a purer heart than he himself knows'[171]) as much as he is disturbed and potentially criminal: he is a mannequin-loving, wannabe woman-killer whose victims always end up being murdered by somebody else instead. Indeed, the innermost core of his being is outside his grasp: he never gives vent to his homicidal tendencies, because they are always carried out by others, so ultimately he remains guiltless. It's again a *solitude morale*-like reversal between inside and outside: his *vie intérieure* is radically made external *without being expressed* (it is not he who murders the victims), and therein the hero finds a kind of catharsis. The graciousness of visual appearance is there precisely to highlight this externality of the hero's innermost being, thanks to which he is fundamentally innocent, and is therefore not liable to be despised by the film.[172] Just as pretty visual appearances are a superficial outwardness pointing to nothing 'inner' whatsoever (they are there just for the sake of it), the hero's innermost being is *only* on the outside, and emphatically so. Moreover, in Rohmerian terms, to regain beauty also means to regain its essential requisite, viz. *movement*, which Buñuel's over-static cinema had always hitherto neglected. In one sequence, a mannequin melting in a potter's kiln suddenly seems to be moving: 'Just as Buñuel frees the hero, the mannequin frees the author from his immobility complex.'[173] What frees the hero is the fact that his vices are carried out by others; what frees Buñuel is the fact that his immobility complex is externalized in a mannequin – which then starts to move.

Sometimes, Rohmer goes as far as to identify *literature as such* (and, by extension, screenplay-driven films) with cynicism and with smugness toward negativity, simply because it cannot count on appearance for appearance's sake. The critic once contrasted Alfred Hitchcock's *I, Confess*, Jean Renoir's *The Golden Coach* and Roberto Rossellini's *Europe 51* on one side with Charlie Chaplin's *Limelight*, Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto D* and John Huston's *The African Queen* on the opposite one (all six films were released in France between 1952

171 *Ibid.*, p. 146.

172 Here is another turn of phrase from the early Jean-Luc Godard ('*Zvenigora – Mitchourine*') associating visual beauty with the negation of cynical detachment: 'Those instinct reproaching this film for its facility should indeed be called low, since they are those of despair, and cannot see any longer that the young girls entrusting the red of their lips to those flags are adorned with the same colours of life itself'. Originally: 'Il faut bien nommer bas les instincts qui reprochent à ce film sa facilité, puisqu'ils sont ceux du désespoir et ne voient pas que les jeunes filles qui confient le rouge de leurs lèvres à leurs drapeux sont parées des couleurs mêmes de la vie.'

173 Rohmer, 'Luis Buñuel: The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz', p. 148.

and 1953). The latter were charged with indulgence in cynicism, sordidness, cheap pessimism and so on and so forth; the first three 'are *cinema*, the highest form of the art, whereas the three that I have contrasted with them are only good films by screen writers.'[174] Chaplin, De Sica and Huston are too literary, as they rely too much on screenplays. That is to say, they rely too much on a balanced, well-structured interplay (like *The Wages of Fear*'s) between narrative and narration qua fundamentally separate dimensions. In this way, they take from literature precisely what cinema should leave behind if it really wants to be more novelistic than the novel itself. For them, the story is one thing, the point of view on it (and/or the effects the viewer is expected to receive, and more generally everything that pertains to the level of narration) is quite another; the screenplay tends to interweave them qua entities which originally are essentially distinct. This very detachment, for the éS/pda, is morally problematic, as it implies a cynical distance separating consciousness (the creator's and the viewer's alike) from its object, whereas appearance for appearance's sake (and most notably the cathartic reversals between inside and outside in *solitude morale* films) entails its involvement.

François Truffaut has extensively elaborated upon this moral/aesthetic point, not only (and most famously) in his 'A Certain Tendency of French Cinema', but even before then, in the very first review he published in the *CC*: 'Les extrêmes me touchent' ('Extremes meet (me)'). In it, he contrasted French cinema with American cinema. While the former is 'three hundred linking shots end to end, one hundred ten times a year,'[175] the latter is based on *action*: 'There is not a shot in this film that isn't necessary to its dramatic progression.'[176] What makes Hollywood great is that in its films narration *virtually disappears behind the need to support the flow of narrative*: it is, so to speak, the vanishing agent thanks to which the story flows. It is that which gives the action its consistency and its pace; as such, the *shooting* is the phase when it is most decisively expected to intervene and deliver. On the contrary, French cinema relies too much on screenplays, i.e. on a predetermined, harmonic interweaving between narration and narrative qua separate dimensions. Because the screenplay is primary, the shooting is either a lazy visualization of the screenplay, unconcerned with bringing action into focus ('everything happens to the right and to the left, *off* the screen'),[177] thus abusing linking shots, or an exacerbation of the divide

174 Rohmer, 'Of Three Films and a Certain School', p. 63.
175 Truffaut, 'Extremes meet (me)', p. 13.
176 *Ibid.*
177 *Ibid.*

structurally underpinning screenplays as such (at least the way the éS/pda saw them), that is, the divide between narrative and narration, thus abusing 'rare angles, unusual lighting, cleverly centred [shots]'[178] arbitrarily added to the story. Crucially, in Truffaut's view, this aesthetic drawback entails *cynicism*, the audience's malevolent detachment from films: he maintains that 'twenty years of fake great subjects'[179] filled with literary pretensions 'have created this blasé public, whose sensibilities and judgement alike are alienated by the base and despicable "fear of being duped".'[180] This fake, literary, screenplay-dependent cinema, so Truffaut implies, simply has the wrong attitude: that of originally conceiving narrative and narration as separate, so that they can be artfully intertwined a posteriori, by a screenwriter and/or a director who thinks of his own contribution and point of view as distinct from (and generally superior to) the narrative matter to be grappled with, and is willing to let it be known by stamping on the images his personal vision (for instance: Clouzot's pessimism as regards one's chances to escape a destiny that fully inheres one's original situation). This cynical detachment on the part of the creator(s) entails in turn a similar one on the part of the spectator: the latter is kept back, confined in one's own separate consciousness, removed from whatever unfolds on the screen, looking in contempt at it (and secretly enjoying an alleged superiority). True action-based cinema, on the contrary, *involves*.

In Godard's first ever published review (of *House of strangers*, 1949), Joseph Mankiewicz (a notoriously literary director, in more than one sense) is described as the cinematic equivalent of writer Alberto Moravia – only better. 'Unlike Moravia's characters, for whom success is always sealed by deception, Mankiewicz's characters are ambitious people who, through deception, end up by succeeding, and lovers who through divorce end up by marrying.'[181] For instance,

> Richard Conte comes to Susan Hayward's apartment and asks her to go out. She refuses, and Conte is just settling down when Susan makes up her mind to go out. The repetition in failure engenders success, and the happy end seems like an inner concomitant of misfortune. Mankiewicz's marital chronicles offer romantic perspectives which are the exact reverse of Moravia's. But their characters reveal the same lack of 'grip on life', and one

178 *Ibid.*
179 *Ibid.*
180 Truffaut, 'Extremes meet (me)', pp. 13-14.
181 Godard, 'Joseph Mankiewicz', p. 14.

> has the same sense of 'expected surprise' (Colette Audry). Whereas with Moravia the success of the work depends on the failure of the characters, with Mankiewicz like acts on like, and the final success of the hero is attended by that of the film.[182]

What comes to the fore through such a wildly far-fetched reading are Godard's unspoken premises, i.e. his 'Rohmerian' belief that cinema, qua more novelistic than the novel itself, is capable to overcome literature's inherent attachment to negativity and pessimism. 'Moravia' here stands for 'literature as such', and Mankiewicz for 'cinema as such'. Literature is, as it were, inherently negative in that it is bound to a 'Sartrean' imagination, viz. one that is distinguished from perception and stems from a nihilation from the world: it rests upon a self-reflexive consciousness whose reflexivity lies (à la Sartre) *either* in its perception of phenomena *and* in itself qua substantially autonomous and separated reflective consciousness (the unconscious in-itself consciousness I have of a chair, is in some measure at the same time a reflected for-itself consciousness of my consciousness of the chair). This inherent separateness of (literary, reflective, narration-shaping, Sartrean, 'for-itself') consciousness, finding its purpose only in transcending its subject matter (through the nihilating power of imagination) entails literature's emphasis on failure (as in the characters' 'lack of grip on life' in Godard's review): the success of Moravia's work depends on the failure of the characters. Crucially, the above passage does not imply that cinema is optimistic and literature is pessimistic, but that cinema *doubles* literary pessimism[183] ('The repetition in failure engenders success'): cinema completely gives in to mechanism, but precisely in so doing it induces an internal deflagration of mechanism enabling freedom. No contingent, reflective consciousness (neither the hero's nor the writer/director's, nor the viewer's, etc.) but within the mechanical, necessary, objective, causal unfolding of *action* itself; no narration supplementing narrative from without; no consciousness nihilation nor transcendence (on the part of the hero nor on that of the writer/director shaping the film) in sight: 'Like acts on like, and the final success of the hero is attended by that of the film.' Elsewhere, he made approximately the same point:

> It seems, moreover, that the crisis in contemporary literature over the last twenty-five years has caused the cinema to answer for errors which are the

182 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

183 Such an argument can legitimately recall the one by Bazin mentioned in Chapter two: continuity editing gets rid of ellipses by making them omnipresent.

> responsibility of literature. Our period writes so badly that it is amazed by such polished speeches as those of American cinema (sober elegance and facile execution often discourage praise); confusing imagination with heart, it becomes irritated and refuses to acknowledge moral qualities which cannot but be present.[184]

Rohmer and the others seemed to maintain that for literary modernism in all its forms, and even more generally for all the forms of literature having abandoned its original realist vocation (in the traditional nineteenth century sense, which also clearly formed the backbone of narrative cinema in the following one), 'objectivity' could only mean to indulge in disillusionment, to say that the world is irredeemably bad, ugly and alienated from an irretrievably separated consciousness. For the cinema, on the contrary, 'objectivity' lies in the 'transcendental' acknowledgement that the subject directly takes part in the production of appearances (the opposite of cynical detachment), and in affirming the possibility for beauty and freedom *within* and *despite* the absolute triumph of mechanism cinema itself cannot but stand for, as the simulacrum of the unity of nature producing appearances whose order and regularity is that of mechanical laws. After comparing *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Howard Hawks, 1953) with Anita Loos's original novel, Rohmer concludes that '"Everything is for the best in the best of the worlds", writes Lorelei to wrap up her diary. As readers, we had laughed, but now, as spectators, we are ready to agree.'[185]

No wonder, then, that the éS/pda valued purely action-based Hollywood cinema far more than most of self-conscious, intellectual, European cinema. As early as 1950, Jacques Rivette unambiguously spelled out the group's preference for the huge machinery of Hollywood, the reign of automatism, over European cinema, charged with 'piling up intentions, preciosities and effects.'[186] Self-consciousness does not consist in watching the world from a distance on the basis of a (Sartrean) self-reflexivity guaranteeing a residual, 'Cartesian' autonomy and substantiality to a consciousness that nonetheless accompanies every perception, but rather, in a Kantian vein, in *nothing but* the void 'I think' of the understanding accompanying our apperceptions and unifying them (and which emphatically *cannot*, in any

184 Godard, 'Defense and Illustration of Classical Construction', p. 26.

185 Rohmer, 'Le meilleur des mondes', p. 45. Originally: '"Tout est pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes", écrit Lorelei avant de refermer son journal. Lecteurs nous avions souri, spectateurs nous sommes prêts à lui accorder raison.'

186 Rivette, 'Les principaux films du rendez-vous de Biarritz', p. 3. Originally: '[...] accumuler les intentions, les recherches et les effets.'

way, meet itself, namely the 'thing which thinks', in reflection and be its own object), in a coherent, necessary, causal succession that is ultimately to be identified with *cinematic action*. Accordingly, they praised the efficacy and elegance of Hollywood filmmakers, who 'have more confidence in the power of what they show us than the angle they choose to show it from."[187] This point is at once metaphysical, moral and aesthetic. Godard wanted the hero of his *Contempt* (*Le mépris*, 1963) to pass 'from book [a novel by, again, Moravia] to screen, [...] from false adventure to real, from Antonioni inertia to Laramiesque dignity';[188] in other words, from the literary self-awareness of a European director to the sense of action of a Hollywood one (Anthony Mann, the director of *The Man from Laramie*, 1955), from being an inert eye statically watching action from a distance, to an eye fully taking part in the unfolding of action without concealing its involvement in it ('dignity').

Sartre was fully aware that his commendation of contemporary American literature intellectualized something whose value lied first and foremost precisely in its lack of intellectual ballast.

> We collected these tools but we lack the naïveté of their creators. We thought about them, we took them apart and put them together again, we theorized about them, and we attempted to absorb them into our great traditions of the novel. We have treated consciously and intellectually what was the fruit of a talented and unconscious spontaneity. [...] Soon the first French novels written during the occupation will appear in the United States. We shall give back to you these techniques which you have lent us. We shall return them digested, intellectualized, less effective, and less brutal – consciously adapted to French taste.[189]

Everything suggests that Rohmer and his *école* deemed this situation as an impasse: by intellectualizing contemporary American literature, Sartre and the others risked to crush under an overabundance of self-consciousness precisely its main asset, namely the fact that it could materialize self-consciousness qua nothingness. Perhaps that asset was just never there in the first place, due to those novels' unquestioned reliance on techniques. More to the point, however, Rohmer seems to have read this impasse as a symptom of the fact that Sartre's philosophical and aesthetic system was not really capable to think reflexive self-consciousness qua nothingness. For this,

187 Rohmer, 'Rediscovering America', p. 89.
188 Godard, '*Le mépris*', p. 200.
189 Sartre, 'American Novelists in French Eyes', p. 118.

one had to turn to Kant, as well as to cinema. The latter, so Rohmer seems to imply, could indeed break out of the impasse outlined in the above quotation, viz. out of a typically literary over-encumbrance of self-consciousness.

Over the years, many scholars have argued that for the éS/pda 'authorship' was in fact a synonym of 'responsibility' in a straightforwardly Sartrean sense.[190] However, this is ultimately not the case. It is tempting to see the auteur/filmmaker as somebody who struggles for freedom from within an impersonal system (Hollywood), and whose personal view emerging film after film can be seen as the 'fundamental project' making its way through time. But, as will be shown in more detail in the follow-up book of the present research, the éS/pda did not at all regard Hollywood as a hostile environment to nihilate from: their conception of it was downright positive. Hollywood had to be *endorsed*, not fought against. Their beloved auteurs were not those who were able to break away from Hollywood's constraints and gradually attained freedom: they were those who were able to find freedom *in* constraints, in the submission to a superior order. They were *integrated*, and not willing to express some 'personal poetics'. The latter was just a non-deliberate outcome of that submission; freedom, a mere by-product of necessity. Therefore, the éS/pda was not really a cinematic offshoot of Sartre's perspective, but emerged by *detaching* from it, and by embracing a far more traditionalist view of aesthetic creation.

To conclude, it is important to stress that the *auteurs* cherished by the éS/pda were not those directors who expressed whatever personal poetics they pleased by means of some personal style. In their view, cinema had *one* privileged theme, a very broad, generic theme that *auteurs* should demonstrate to be able to grapple with. This theme is *freedom*; their conception had little to do with Sartre's conception of freedom, and way more with the universal conflict between will and destiny. This conflict, echoed in several crucial parts of Kant's practical philosophy, was once at the core of ancient tragedy (which not incidentally knew a regain of interest in the Kantian aftermath), and now informed the contemporary version of ancient tragedy: *solitude morale*. *Solitude morale* is a narrative pattern in which a character self-imposes freedom upon herself, thereby entering into conflict with herself and with the world, until she undergoes a peculiar, catharsis-like reversal between the inside and outside, whereby the innermost core of her being finds itself externalized. When this reversal takes place, two basic

190 See, for instance Ray, *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies*, p. 89.

conditions are matched: the emergence of appearance for appearance's sake and the disruption of the cause-effect (narrative) texture. In other words: temporal sequentiality breaks down, and spatiality comes through. Naturally, there are potentially infinite ways to match these two conditions, so there are potentially infinite ways for characters, films and *auteurs* to comply with *solitude morale*. *Auteurs* are those who know how 'to draw somebody's gestures and behaviour as well as to define a character and to mark its specificity by means of one and only one stroke':[191] in other words, how to achieve the coincidence between the inside and the outside ('to draw somebody's gestures and behaviour [...] by means of one and only one stroke') and at the same time to diligently comply with narrative needs ('to define a character') while departing from it in a personal way ('to mark its specificity'). True authorship is characterized by the inseparability of these three aspects.

What should not be missed here is that the freedom of the character, the freedom of the auteur and the freedom of the viewer are loosely but actually interconnected; the point is less 'whose freedom is at stake' than 'what connects and variously enables all three.' The answer is *the inherent inconsistency of mechanistic determinism*, its internal deflagration, engendered by the clash between narrative and cinema's mechanical imagination. The inevitable fissures of the cause-effect texture caused by this clash between two elements ultimately belonging to different faculties *are* freedom (the character's and/or the *auteur*'s and/or the viewer's). Once again, Sartre is irretrievably far away: consciousness here is not a Sartrean for-itself consciousness whose freedom emerges *along with its specific individuation*, but rather a mere, indefinite by-product of the overall, always ongoing, non-locatable fight between mechanical necessity and freedom.

In the wake of Heidegger, who twisted Kant to his own purposes by emphasizing the coincidence between time and self-affection as such, for Sartre freedom coincides with one's fundamental project, which cannot be accessed in itself through consciousness's self-reflection, but still has some determinable consistency, insofar as it is essentially a temporalization, and emerges through the intersubjective play between the self and the other. In this respect, consciousness is external for Sartre as well; suffice it to mention once again the characters of *Huis Clos*, who are all unable to self-reflexively cope with the fundamental project that individually dominates each one of them, and that can only be determined by way of the mutual interplay

191 Rohmer, 'Les vikings'. Originally: '[...] du même trait dessiner un geste et un caractère, cerner le personnage et imprimer leur marque propre.'

among them all. Yet, for Rohmer it is external in a different sense, chiefly because 'his' Kant disowns the twentieth-century phenomenological Kant of the Husserlian-Heideggerian-Sartrean legacy. For him, the impossibility of a directly self-reflexive self-consciousness does not lead to regarding consciousness in terms of time (Heidegger's *Dasein*; Sartre's view of freedom qua fundamental project qua for-itself consciousness), but rather to the primacy of space: by returning to Kant in a somewhat eccentric, arguably pre-Deleuzian but in many ways still coherently Kantian fashion, Rohmer seemingly (if implicitly) links the impossibility of a directly self-reflexive self-consciousness with the acknowledgement that consciousness is nowhere to be self-reflexively found but in the 'I think' accompanying perception. Therefore, the kind of freedom cinema could be after according to Rohmer had no longer nothing to do with a fundamental project consisting in a temporalization only coming to the fore through the interplay with other fundamental projects; rather, freedom, like self-consciousness itself, could not but be located *out there*, in space, in external appearance, nestled in the objects of perception and ultimately irreducible to any intersubjective dynamics, let alone to a determinism of whatever kind. In other words, it can be argued that for Rohmer cinema, by pushing Kant's perspective and that of the Kantian aftermath itself to their extremes, brings forth yet another outcome of the old, ever ongoing conflict between freedom and necessity: my self-consciousness, hence my freedom, is nothing but an object out there, in external appearance. As such, it is not even really mine.

Let us have another look at Paul Willemen's particularly insightful remark, already referenced in the previous chapter:

> [The discourse of revelation] takes many forms in relation to cinema. The whole argument around realism hinges on a discourse of revelation just as the whole *Cahiers du Cinéma* auteur polemic basically was a discourse of revelation, the revelation of the soul. Whether it was the soul of the viewer being projected onto the screen, the soul of the actress being revealed in Rossellini's *Stromboli* or the soul of Hitchcock being revealed in *I Confess*, there was always a discourse of revelation under it all in different modalities.[192]

Willemen is very careful *not* to distinguish between the viewer's soul, the *auteur*'s and the character's, because the éS/pda's confusion is every bit as intentional. What really matters is that *the soul is outside, not whose soul*

192 Willemen, *Looks and Frictions*, p. 232.

it is supposed to be. The éS/pda celebrated *the possibility of* freedom, not *somebody's* freedom in particular. Earlier in this chapter, the following passage was quoted:

> Before Rossellini even the most inspired and original of film-makers would feel duty-bound to use the legacy of his precursors. He was familiar with all the ways that, by some kind of conditioned reflex, particular emotional reactions could be provoked in an audience – down to the smallest gesture or movement; and he would play on those reflexes, not try to break them. He would create art, a personal work, that is, but made out of a shared cinematic substance. For Rossellini this substance does not exist. His actors do not behave like the actors in other films, except in the sense that their gestures and attitudes are common to all human beings, but they urge us to look for something else behind this behaviour, something other than what our natural role as spectators would prompt us to recognize.[193]

The key here is 'they urge us to look for something else.' Appearance for appearance's sake is to be conceived as a kind of black hole of indeterminacy (a pure outcome of cinema's mechanical, externalized imagination unable to fall under any definite concept of the understanding/reason) swallowing the author, the character and the viewer alike. Because he or she is *compelled* to determine a posteriori a matter that does not stem from any definite determination, the viewer is virtually involved in it from the outset. The pure possibility of freedom, stemming from the internal deflagration of mechanical determinism and being given as appearance for appearance's sake, involves the viewer as well as the character and the author. No definite ownership is needed for the possibility of freedom to be there: what matters is just the fact that it is there.

Involvement is indeed a crucial issue in Rohmer's (and the éS/pda's) ethics. The éS/pda makes a point of showing that freedom and beauty are still possible, in spite of an allegedly widespread attitude (an attitude that for various reasons these critics are led to deem as quintessentially *literary*) of smugness toward negativity, of cynical resignation in the face of a grim world entirely dominated by causes and effects (that is, by petty personal – 'pathological', in Kant's word – interest). Therefore, cinematic morality also has to do with the involvement of the spectator *in* the action being deployed (as opposed to the cynical, detached attitude of contemplation of some moral of physical opprobrious from a safe distance).

193 Rohmer, 'The Land of Miracles', pp. 205-206.

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—, 'La fureur de vivre', *Arts*, 562 (4-10 April 1956), 5.
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Abbreviations

CC = *Cahiers du Cinéma*
éS = *école Schérer*
GoG = Tom Milne (ed. and trans.), *Godard on Godard*. London and New York: Da Capo, 1972.
pda = *politique des auteurs*
ToB = Jean Narboni and Eric Rohmer (eds.), *The Taste of Beauty*, trans. by Carol Volk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

6. After Modernity: Rohmer's Classicism and Universalism

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Abstract
From the outset of his career, Eric Rohmer made no secret of his preference for classicism, as far as both aesthetics in general and cinematic aesthetics in particular are concerned. One must hasten to add, however, that he never really conceived of "classic" and "modern" as two opposite concepts. Rather, he maintained that what is truly classic is also truly modern, because in either case genuine art is primarily about achieving a certain harmony with nature. What he exactly meant by this forms the main subject matter of this chapter, which also clarifies the degree to which Rohmer's aesthetics can be called "universalist" and "anti-evolutionist", and why. In addition, Rohmer's views on the key notions of authorship and *mise en scene* are also summarily sketched.

Keywords: Rohmer, classic, modern, universalism, aesthetics

6.1. Beyond modern art

Rohmer's attachment to classical tragedy is a clear token of his overt classicism, which can hardly be accounted for as orthodox and one-dimensional. For him, 'classicism' and 'modernity' are not necessarily opposite. In order to clarify this issue, it is again useful to draw upon Kant, since the critic's classicism and his peculiar, idiosyncratic Kantism ultimately shed a decisive light on each other.

For one thing, Rohmer does not connect cinema and Kantian aesthetics in a straightforward way. Contrary to what the previous chapter(s) might have suggested, in spite of cinema's capability to attain artistic and natural beauty and to tackle freedom, it would be too simplistic to maintain that Rohmer regarded cinema simply as the perfect match to Kant's ideas on aesthetics. According to the critic, the influence of the German philosopher

on the history of aesthetics occurred primarily *behind cinema's back*: Kant's 'Copernican revolution' affected a phase of the history of aesthetics that was definitely prior to cinema. Rather, Rohmer seems to imply that cinema accomplishes those ideas by taking them *beyond* the aesthetics that came in Kant's immediate aftermath (that is, modern aesthetics broadly conceived). This again attests to the fact that Rohmer's appropriation of Kant is far from orthodox, and is rather driven by the urgency, at that point in time, to get rid of the Sartrean and phenomenological frame.

De Mozart en Beethoven, Rohmer's late treatise about music, relying extensively on Kant's philosophy, makes this assumption particularly apparent. Therein, he recapitulates an issue he had spilt a lot of ink over during his years as a film critic: the relationship between cinema and the other arts – particularly painting. Kant is again a major reference – but in relation to *modern painting*, rather than cinema.

> The modern vision of art is born from Kant, although this was not part of Kant's original intentions. It refuses to consider the world as a thing in itself, and only contemplates the vision the artist has of it. In a painting by Cézanne, truth does not lie in its pseudo-conformity with the model; rather, it is to be found in the mark that witnessed the operation through which the painter perceived the model. [...] From the impressionists to Cézanne and the cubists, space qua form of perception becomes the real subject matter of painting. The subjective and the objective are reversed. Art and reality change roles. The Cezannian construction begets the reality of the painted object: the latter only exists insofar as it belongs to a whole regulated by strict laws, laws which are not a posteriori induced from our vision of the real, but which have an a priori control over such vision, laws originating from the very form of our sensibility. The painter gives us the opportunity to discover such laws through their very infringement, which the uninitiated mistakes for clumsiness.[1]

1 Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, pp. 98-99. Originally: 'La vision moderne de l'art est fille de Kant, même si Kant ne l'avait pas prévue. Elle refuse de considérer le monde comme une chose en soi, elle ne peint que la vision que l'artiste a de celui-ci. Ce qui fait la vérité d'un tableau de Cézanne, ce n'est pas une pseudo-adéquation au modèle, c'est la trace qu'il porte en lui de l'opération par laquelle le peintre le perçoit. [...] A partir des impressionnistes, jusqu'à Cézanne et au cubistes, l'espace, en tant que forme de notre perception, devient le véritable sujet de la peinture. Le subjectif et l'objectif s'inversent. Art et réalité échangent leurs roles. La construction cézanienne est garante de la réalité de l'objet peint: il n'existe que parce qu'il s'inscrit dans un ensemble qui a ses lois strictes, lois non pas induites à posteriori de notre vision du réel, mais qui a priori commandent cette vision, lois de la forme même de notre sensibilité,

Modern painting shows the object qua filtered by the subject. Things in empirical reality (phenomena) can only appear by way of the subject's a priori forms of sensible intuition. According to Kant, these forms are themselves unattainable: they cannot be the object of a representation and reached 'in themselves,' so they can only be represented by distorting and infringing them in turn. This is precisely what modern art does: in the paintings by the impressionists, by Cézanne, by the Cubists and the like, things look unreal precisely because they are an inevitably non-transparent reproduction of the optical laws regulating the emergence of deceptively transparent appearances. In this way, viewers are made aware of the 'filters' whereby they ordinarily experience things.[2]

The above passage identifies the subject matter of modern painting in 'space qua form of perception.' This can help us understand why, after his conversion, Rohmer's writings started to depict cinema as an 'art of nature', noticeably more often than before, while the definition 'art of space' unquestionably dropped in frequency. This change all but confirms the impression that Rohmer regarded cinema, not as a token of the properly modern art that emerged in Kant's immediate aftermath, but as a medium that, on the one hand, perfectly lends itself to be read in a Kantian vein, and, on the other hand, posits the notion of it being a reproduction of the 'immediate mediation' regulating experience *beyond* the dichotomy opposing transparency to non-transparency. According to him, cinema is something more than, and different from, a necessarily imperfect reproduction of the a priori forms of sensible intuitions.

> There is no need for cinema to take us beyond common perception, since it is through its faithful reproduction, in its maximal objectivity that cinema, as an autonomous art, attains Being. Paradoxically, art will be all the greater and the more authentic if there is pure and simple copy

et que le peintre nous apprend à découvrir en tant que telles par les entorses qu'il leur fait, et que le profane prend pour des maladresses.'

2 The selfsame argument is also sketched earlier in the same book (p. 22), in a passage referencing not only Kant (in an almost identical way), but also Nicolas Boileau and his verse 'Rien n'est beau que le vrai: le vrai seul est aimable' roughly meaning 'Nothing is beautiful but what is true: only what is true is lovable'. Rohmer quotes this verse fairly often (for instance in his 'Cette nuit-là'); here, he turns it upside down to paraphrase the 'Kantian' reversal of modern art: 'Nothing is true but what is beautiful'. He does the very same thing also in an essay that was already quoted a few times: 'The Taste of Beauty' (p. 75). However, in the English translation, this reference is nowhere to be found, as the translator preferred to render it by means of Keats's reversal 'truth is beauty'/'beauty is truth.' The same point, without any outspoken philosophical reference, is also elaborated in Rohmer, 'II. Le siècle des peintres.'

> and not willingness to interpret. This role reversal between reality and artist, opposite to the role played by the modern painter, introduces in its own way a transcendental dimension to the work, if only for the very particular and brand new conscience it gives us of the form of Time.[3]

By *externalizing* what is normally carried out by our imagination (the synthesis of the manifold of appearance), as per our discussion of Astruc's article in Chapter two, cinema indeed gives us 'a brand new conscience' of 'the form of Time.' As we have seen, the necessity evoked by its irreversible unfolding urges understanding to regard it as an objective succession driven by causality, and in so doing it puts us in touch with 'the unity of nature' regulating our access to phenomena. Therein consists cinema's 'transcendental dimension': no longer the non-transparent reproduction of space qua form of perception, viz. of the optical laws regulating the emergence of deceptively transparent appearances, but a *transparent* rendering of *time* qua form of perception by way of its spatialization. Once again, this transparency is not to be meant as an actual access to, or faithful depiction of, the represented object, but an accomplished reproduction of the 'immediate mediation' whereby it appears.

Like painting, cinema reproduces the filters of consciousness. A painting, though, is compelled to look unlike our ordinary vision, and it makes us aware of our ordinary vision by departing from it. Its own aesthetic value can be easily said to depend on the specific way the painting differs from its 'model', from the way it is ordinarily seen. Conversely, in cinema, this reproduction of our subjective filters, along with the existence of any kind of aesthetic value in the sense sketched above, can now be *one with* our ordinary, 'transparent' perception. Modern art follows Kant's Copernican revolution,[4] and reverses the subject and the object, art and nature; cinema comes full circle and reverses modern art's Kantian reversal. In modern art, the object of the work of art was the very way subjects perceived the objects

3 Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, p. 103. Originally: 'Le cinéma n'a pas besoin de nous mener au-delà de la perception commune, puisque c'est par la reproduction fidèle de celle-ci, dans son "objectivité" maximale, qu'il accède à l'être, en tant qu'art autonome. Paradoxalement, l'art sera d'autant plus grand et plus authentique chez lui qu'il y aura copie pure et simple, et non volonté d'interprétation. Cette inversion du rôle de la réalité et de l'artiste, contraire de celle qu'opère le peintre moderne, peut introduire à sa façon dans l'oeuvre une dimension transcendantale, ne serait-ce que par la conscience particulière et toute nouvelle qu'elle nous donne de la forme du Temps.'

4 This connection is also made by Robert Pippin in his *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, p. 59.

unbeknownst to themselves, as it were; by reversing this reversal, cinema obviously does not return to the object per se, but rather highlights the subjective production of appearances *as an objective process*. This does not mean that the appearances thereby produced are 'true', but that cinema, by objectifying/spatializing time, produces appearances seemingly submitted to the same order and regularity characterizing the 'unity of nature' to which our everyday experience is necessarily ('objectively') bound.

Rohmer's point is that whereas the goal of modern art was to reproduce consciousness's filters making us see an object the way we ordinarily would, the task of cinema is to reproduce consciousness's filters making us see an object the way we ordinarily would *while* we see it the way we ordinarily do.[5] In this way, cinema manages to be more Kantian than Kantian modern art itself. In the passage taking Cézanne as an example, the 'real subject matter of painting' is 'space qua form of perception.' In the case of cinema, though, the real subject matter is time itself, presented in a spatialized hence objectified form. Cinema is not 'objective' in the sense that it provides us with

5 This idea is best exemplified by Godard's and Rohmer's perplexity toward *Magirama* (1956), a film in which Abel Gance tried to revive polyvision (the horizontal juxtaposition of three screens, each showing different images), a technical arrangement he already employed in his *Napoleon* (1927). For all of their love for Gance, they could not but object that there was little point in employing polyvision in the mid-Fifties, because cinemascope already achieved the same outcome of polyvision (the enlargement of the range of vision) *with greater attention to ordinary vision*. In a Kantian vein, ordinary vision rests upon *synthesis*, while the juxtaposition of different images remains hopelessly analytical (one cannot watch all of the screens at the same time). 'While reducing in the extreme the role of montage, cinemascope can nonetheless obtain striking effects from close-ups, as shown in our example. It relies on succession and simultaneity all at once, and brings forth synthetically what Gance brought forth by way of analysis. Their ends are similar but their means differ. Contemporary filmmakers too love to flesh out the melodic lines of their works with thicker and thicker chords (here I draw on Gance's own metaphor). Instinctively, they have entered the age of "polyphony" without recourse to intricate devices. [...] It does seem that for Rossellini, Renoir, Ray and others, "the age of the exploded image" has already come. While still remaining "absolutely modern" [...], without departing from their chosen objectivity, they have found again the sense of symbol so cherished by silent cinema, and which the generation of the 1930s had almost completely lost.' Originally: 'Le cinémascope, qui reduit à l'extreme la part du montage, sait pourtant tirer, l'exemple nous le montre, des effets saisissants des gros plans d'insert. Il joue sur la succession et la simultanéité tout à la fois et produit synthétiquement ce que Gance produit par l'analyse. Les buts sont communs mais les moyens diffèrent. Les metteurs en scènes d'aujourd'hui, aiment eux aussi à étoffer d'accords de plus en plus fournis (je reprends une métaphore de Gance) la ligne mélodique de leur oeuvre. D'istinct ils sont entrés, sans recours à un matériel compliqué, dans l'ère de la "polyphonie". [...] Il semble bien que pour Rossellini, Ray, Renoir, et d'autres encore, "l'âge de l'image éclatée" soit déjà venu. Tout en restant "absolument modernes" [...], sans se départir de leur objectivité de principe, ils ont retrouvé ce sens du symbole, cher au cinéma muet, et quasi perdu par la génération des années 30.' Rohmer, 'Magirama'; Godard, 'Future, Present, Past: *Magirama*'.

a faithful reproduction of things, but rather in the sense that it highlights the process whereby those things appear to us, *as an objective one*. When Rohmer says that 'what the painter or sculptor obtains only by cunning or violence, "expression", is an integral part of cinema's existence,'[6] what he means is that cinema never reaches the object in itself, and that it never expunges 'expression' (the distortion produced by the limits and filters of consciousness). The difference, however, lies in the fact that this 'expression' is produced objectively, i.e. through time in its objectified form. Because of this objectification, what cinema attains is a faithful reproduction not of the things themselves standing in front of the lens, but rather of what is referred to in the passage above as 'common perception.' Painters and sculptors 'try to take us beyond common perception' in that they try to represent the a priori laws of our perception while still bound to time-qua-not-spatialized; in other words, through a subjective bias departing from 'common perception' (that is, 'only by cunning or violence'). Cinema, while no less 'violent' vis-a-vis the object as such, and thus still carrying on with modern art's critical agenda (consisting in giving a shape to our 'immediate mediation'), reverts to 'common perception' by regaining that which makes it common, i.e. time-qua-spatialized. As shown in Chapter two, the 'unity of nature' that this 'common perception' essentially stands for, rests upon a temporal irreversibility that nothing can provide as fittingly as cinema's externalization of the synthesis of the manifold of appearances (i.e. time spatialized/objectified). And while scholarship has abundantly demonstrated the affinity between Kantian aesthetics and such modern art movements as Cubism (see for instance Mark Cheetham's 'Kant and Cubism Revisited'), it should not be forgotten that the fact that *The Critique of Judgement* does not grant any precedence to non-representational art over representational art (including cinema, mimicking our common perception of things) has been demonstrated in an equally convincing way (see for instance Eva Schaper's 'Free and Dependent Beauty').

6.2. Classic = Modern

Howard Hawks, said Rohmer, 'does not need run after the modern, because he possesses modernity from the start.'[7] According to the critic, the exact same thing applies to cinema as well: it does not need the Copernican revolution of modernity, because, as described above, it reverses the very

6 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 51.

7 Rohmer, 'The Photogenics of Sports: The Olympics in Rome', p. 123.

reversal modernity rests upon. Indeed, the main target of his polemics was probably not Sartre per se, but more broadly a certain conception of modernity:[8] 'By breaking off from nature, modern art degrades man, whereas it meant to elevate him.'[9] Cinema should turn instead to classicism, if 'we call *classical* the periods when beauty in art and beauty in nature seemed to be one and the same.'[10] A classical art is one in which artistic contribution serves the transparency of nature instead of sticking 'critically' out of it (or of 'nihilating' in a Sartrean vein). Like eighteenth-century artists, says Godard, the cinematic artist 'acknowledges nature as art's principal model.'[11] Again, we should beware: 'nature', for Rohmer, is meant in the Kantian way, viz. as the totality of appearances – which amounts to saying that a classical art is one in which artistic contribution serves to highlight appearances in accordance with the transcendental mediation informing all of such appearances. This is precisely what the 'immediate mediation' embodied by cinema seems particularly fit to deliver. The crucial point, one logically ensuing from our discussion about the relationship between 'Kantian' modern art and cinema, is that cinema qua classical art *follows* modern art instead of preceding it.

Therefore, it is not enough to claim that 'Rohmer has always claimed the need to understand modernity in the light of the classicism that preceded and enabled it':[12] rather, classicism is 'at the very forefront of modernity.'[13] In Rohmer's own words: 'The classical age of cinema is not behind us, but ahead.'[14] Cinema had to stick to classical virtues: elegance, efficacy, naturalness, sobriety, the capability to represent with a detached serenity the intricate, contradictory obscurities of human being; a sense of measure, of balance, of order, of unadorned simplicity.

This stubborn classicism might partly explain Rohmer's occasional, not fully convincing recourse to Plato; it would be easy to demonstrate that

8 The sparse notes (contained in his personal archives held at the library of the Cinémathèque Française, Paris, folder RIVETTE 86 – B19(215)) which Rivette penned after his interview with Roland Barthes (for issue 147 of the *CC*, September 1963), include a passage affirming that modernity started with Baudelaire, ended with surrealism, and was brushed off once and for all by Sartre.

9 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 53.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

11 Godard, 'Defense and Illustration of Classical Construction', p. 27.

12 Coureau, 'Petite anthologie de l'ontologie rohmérienne', p. 34. Originally: 'Depuis toujours, Rohmer affirme la nécessité de comprendre la modernité au regard du classicisme qui l'a précédée et rendue possible.'

13 Schilling, *Eric Rohmer*, p. 76.

14 Rohmer, 'The Classical Age of Film', p. 41.

when he references the Greek philosopher in his writings about Hitchcock's *Rear Window*[15] and *Vertigo*, what he is really getting at is a very Kantian argument regarding self-consciousness 'disguised as' Platonic.[16] This disguise

15 Chabrol and Rohmer, *Hitchcock*, p. 122-128.

16 *Vertigo*, according to the critic, is about '*ideas*, in the noble, platonic sense of the word' ('Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*', p. 172). Scottie, the hero, is 'in love not with a woman but with the idea of a woman' (*Ibid.*, p. 170). Moreover, *Vertigo*'s structure entirely revolves around *reminiscence*. For Plato, true knowledge is not empirical, but lies in the reminiscence of the innate ideas in ourselves. Accordingly, the more Scottie's quest for truth progresses, the more he is pushed back toward the past. The structure of the film constantly reconnects the present with the past. This reconnection is visually emphasized not only by the subtle play with vintage architecture (as more extensively pointed out by a different review of the same film: Rohmer, 'Sueurs froides'), but also by means of a particularly recurrent geometrical figure: the *spiral* (or, more precisely, the helix). 'Everything forms a circle, but the loop never closes, the revolution carries us ever deeper into reminiscence' (Rohmer, 'Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*', p. 172). Here is where the film, as well as Rohmer's review, seem to be at their most platonic, particularly if one considers that one of Plato's dialogues, *Meno*, intertwined reminiscence with geometry. Therein, Socrates convinces Meno that knowledge is innate, by drawing geometric figures on the ground and asking one of Meno's slaves a geometrical question, which he answers correctly despite his total ignorance of geometry (whose knowledge is innate in ourselves, and which should as such only be reminisced, rather than empirically apprehended). In fact, the specific figure Rohmer recurs to in his review (the spiral) radically undermines his platonic argument. As Peg Rawes rightly pointed out, *Meno* seems to imply that virtue is *shape*, and *shape* is *limit*. 'For Plato, limit is therefore equated with an identifiable boundary or end, which supports the notion of the geometric figure as a "bounded figure".' (Rawes, *Space, Geometry and Aesthetics*, p. 29). But the spiral is not a bounded figure: it is infinite. (Perhaps not incidentally, in Plato's *Theaetetus* dialogue, fragment 147d, the eponymous character recalls his teacher Theodorus's *failure* to draw in the sand a geometrical figure that remains unnamed, but that ultimately turns out to unambiguously be a spiral). A spiral ensues from the combination between a circle and a line, more precisely one in which the circle never closes, but rather forms a never ending loop. Therefore, in this case the reminiscence is infinite, and never attains a definite knowledge. Thereby, *Vertigo* as well as Rohmer's review ultimately fail to really match the platonic frame. If anything, the infinite regression of the spiral resembles the Self's impossible encounter with itself in self-reflection (that is, Kant's encounter of the self with itself only as appearance and never in itself); no wonder Rohmer says that *Vertigo* is a kind of parable of knowledge 'just like *Rear Window*' (Rohmer, 'Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*', p. 170), which he deemed as 'a reflexive, critical work in the Kantian sense of the word' (Chabrol and Rohmer, *Hitchcock*, p. 124), and which he openly compares to Plato's cavern in this article. Whereas geometric figures in Plato's *Meno* are a priori ideas that can be accessed by reminiscence, in Kant's system (whose position regarding geometry owes a lot to Plato's *Meno*, as argued by, among others, Peg Rawes in the first pages of her *Space, Geometry and Aesthetics*) they are the outcome of imagination's a priori productive activity. Spirals in *Vertigo* should *but cannot* embody platonic ideas and reminiscence; they are in fact a bridge stretching to Kant, to the impossibility to cognize space qua a priori form of intuition (strictly connected to the impossibility of full self-reflection) turning in the third Critique into the possibility of producing and acknowledging an *aesthetic* equivalent of the a priori contribution of imagination, by means of the 'free play' engendering (among other forms of purposiveness without purpose) geometric figures. This simultaneous possibility and impossibility of self-reflection should be thought of

is mainly a *rhetorical* rather than a theoretical move, insofar as it is meant to emphasize the fact that cinema is firmly rooted in classicism. Also, it is a way of stressing that to be faithful to Kant's philosophy means to take it *beyond* Kant, and to reconnect it to a classicism the philosopher had no reasons to embrace, but that many variously embraced in his wake (for instance, the artists and thinkers who proposed a sort of revival of classical tragedy, as mentioned in the last chapter).

Rohmer's anti-modern bias (according to which classicism and modernity are strictly homogeneous) soon extended to the rest of the *école Schérer* (éS), and eventually to the *politique des auteurs* (pda) as well.[17] Godard frequently asserted that cinema is 'classically romantic'[18] and/or vice versa: Georges Franju (who 'seeks and finds classicism behind romanticism'[19]) is 'romantically classical.'[20] His definition that cinema is 'the expression of lofty sentiments'[21] also sounds fairly anti-modern. Truffaut once said that, unlike Lautréamont and the surrealists, he found the encounter between an umbrella and a sewing-machine on a dissecting table far less moving than the encounter between two human gazes, or the sharp portrayal of the relationships between two flesh-and-blood characters.[22]

Rohmer's invectives against academicism and against mannerist films posing as classical are particularly useful for describing the critic's idea of classicism. According to him, William Wyler's *Friendly Persuasion* (1956)

alongside Scottie's predicament. He cannot access his 'idea of a woman' (Madeleine is, one way or another, forever out of his reach), but at the same time he *can* and he *does*: when he tries to dress up her lover like Madeleine after Madeleine's supposed death, he suddenly realizes that she actually *is* Madeleine. This is precisely why Slavoj Žižek (*Organs without Bodies*, pp. 200-205) claimed that *Vertigo* is in fact an *anti-Platonist* film: the unattainable essence of ideas is revealed to be coincident with appearance. Similarly, as we shall see in the next chapter, the hero of *Rear Window* finds his own unattainable consciousness on the outside. It follows that, in spite of Rohmer's occasional outspoken Platonism, the claims that the critic belongs to 'a Platonist tradition' (Lellis, *Bertolt Brecht,* Cahiers du Cinéma *and Contemporary Film Theory*, pp. 16-17) are to be taken with a grain of salt. His writings on *Vertigo* and *Rear Window*, among others, show that he was interested in Plato only insofar as the Greek philosopher foreshadowed, in a somewhat different fashion, Kantian issues the critic tackled far more recurrently.

17 Conspicuous anti-modern undertones can be found, for instance, in 'L'église moderne', a rather improbable project by Rohmer and Truffaut for a film about a mountain village whose residents want to build a church to attract tourists. A 1953 extended plot synopsis of the film (which was never made) is kept in Truffaut's personal archives.

18 Godard, 'Bergmanorama', p. 76.

19 Godard, 'La tête contre les murs'(a), p. 130.

20 Godard, 'La tête contre les murs'(b), p. 148.

21 Godard, 'What is Cinema?', p. 31.

22 François Truffaut (unsigned), 'Une grande oeuvre: *El*, de Buñuel', p. 2.

is a compendium of all that is *not* classical but which pretends to be so. Its realism consists of indulging in cheap verisimilitude, in a vain attempt to reproduce everyday reality (for instance, Wyler shows the hero chasing a goose to add a 'real life flavour' to his film) and in sheer appearances poorly trying to mimic what ordinary vision looks like, for instance by abusing depth-of-field techniques. All this clearly contrasts with Rohmer's notion of 'appearance for appearance's sake,' which is not to be intended as a mere reproduction of reality, but as the capacity to *seize beauty* (purposiveness without purpose) in ordinary appearances. It also indulges in sentimentalism and shies away from the tragic – in other words, it waters down conflicts: when the hero goes to war, he is shown crying on an enemy's corpse. Each gesture, with no exception, belongs to a stiff, rigid cause-effect texture. 'Expression', as opposed to manifestation, is the rule: 'Each gesture, each look, corresponds to a precise feeling which is recorded in the dictionary of the cinematic language.'[23] So, the final verdict can only be as follows:

> To go back to the ancients, as the young school indeed does, is only fine: what our author could be reproached for is rather to draw out of them nothing but what tradition has already drawn out, as opposed to getting hold of the treasures overlooked by their direct followers. So this could be the definition of academicism: to contemplate the ancients solely through the pile of scoriae the intermediary ages have accumulated between them and us. Griffith invented gestures. To follow his example requires inventing new ones, not to resume those he has already offered.[24]

Rohmer's idea of classicism is as indeterminate as it is precise. Classic art is unambiguously art in accordance with nature, but *no form or formula* can be said to steadily stand for what this accordance is supposed to be. Precisely because the unity of nature is an a priori of our understanding, it cannot be pinned down reflexively in a steady, definitive way. Every artistic context

23 Rohmer, '*La loi du seigneur* propose la parfaite définition du pire académisme'. Originally: 'A chaque geste, chaque regard, correspond un sentiment précis inscrit au dictionnaire du langage cinématographique.'

24 *Ibid*. Originally: 'Il est bon de remonter aux anciens, comme le fait d'ailleurs la jeune école: ce qu'on peut reprocher à notre auteur est de ne continuer à tirer d'eux que ce que la tradition en a tiré, non d'y retourner puiser les richesses que les épigones immédiats avaient laissées échapper. Telle pourrait donc être bien la définition de l'académisme: ne contempler les anciens qu'à travers l'amas de scories que les âges intermédiaires ont accumulé entre eux et nous. Griffith inventait des gestes. Suivre son exemple, c'est en inventer d'autres, non reprendre ceux qu'il nous proposait.'

has to relate to nature somehow, but nothing can prescribe in advance the form enabling it to do so. In order to be classical, one cannot just rely on formulas invented in other allegedly classical contexts: one must come up with something original (i.e. related to one's own context and possibilities) in order to sort out some kind of viable accordance with nature.

6.3. An anti-evolutionist approach

This also explains why, in 1961, right when modernist new wave cinemas began to emerge all over the world, the critic juxtaposed and equalized the new films by Otto Preminger and Jean Rouch, the old *auteur* of classical Hollywood and the young modern filmmaker: what both directors shared was 'a common respect for nature.'[25] The centrality of nature (the totality of appearances, namely appearance 'as such', whatever appears according to transcendental mediation and is thus liable to carry along sourceless 'purposiveness without purpose') is transhistorical, and characterizes classical art as well as modern art. However, 'transhistorical' does not necessarily mean 'anti-historical'; if anything, Rohmer's idea that art is eternally bound to nature rather seems *anti-evolutionist*. 'This idea of a *before* and an *after*, of a unilinear evolution, seems questionable. Beethoven's last quartets are neither more nor less modern than Liszt's first, and Cézanne's *Bathers* is neither more nor less modern than the first Matisse.'[26] Since modern and classical art share the same goals (they differ only in their means), it is pointless to presuppose a classic era coming before a modern one, or a modern one coming after a classical one. There is no reason to presuppose *a progress*, a straight line progressing from the classical to the modern and beyond. 'To represent the evolution of the Beaux-Arts as a natural and continuous process, by only depicting it as a reflection, as a by-product, as the thermometer of a civilisation, as the fruits of a worldview and of a sensibility which is everyday different from the day before, would be tantamount to offending them, not to honour them.'[27] Rohmer's target here is a deterministic view of art, typical of certain Marxist traditions, according to which art is the mere outcome of underlying material processes. In

25 Rohmer, 'The Taste for Beauty', p. 79.

26 Rohmer, 'Of Three Films and a Certain School', p. 59.

27 Rohmer, 'II. Le siècle des peintres', p. 14. Originally: 'Ce n'est pas rendre hommage aux Beaux-Arts, mais bien leur faire injure que de figurer leur évolution comme un processus naturel et continue, de ne voir en eux qu'un reflet, un épiphénomène, le termomètre d'une civilisation, le fruit d'une vision du monde, d'une sensibilité chaque jour différente de celle de la vieille.'

contrast with this view, the critic remains faithful to a Kantian conception of art qua strictly related to freedom, that is, to the possibility to flee from determinism. 'Art evolved by means of internal spasms, not by history.'[28]

'Isou or Things as They Are (Views of the Avant-Garde)' is an interesting case in point. In this article, Rohmer shows that there is no contradiction in claiming that the *CC* judge films *sub specie aeternitatis* ('under the aspect of eternity')[29] while supporting *Treatise on Slobber and Eternity* (*Traité de bave et d'éternité*), a 1951 ultra-radical avant-garde film by Isidore Isou aiming at the total disruption of past artistic traditions. The critic argued that Isou's iconoclast nihilism went far enough to dismiss *avant-garde itself*[30] along with its pretension to lead art to some kind of progress by way of the discontinuity avant-garde typically stands for. Isou was not looking for any kind of progress at all – just disruption. Nonetheless, Isou's intention to give up any kind of expression resulted in him having to cling to something to be put in the film, and this 'something' turned out to be some random shots of Paris: a piece of rough, unpolished, documentary-like urban footage which, according to Rohmer, emanated an intriguing sense of *presence*, whereby the charm of nature was ultimately (and surprisingly) reinstated.[31]

Rohmer's fleeting, short-lived encounter with Isou's Lettrism was not the only occasion when the path of classicism-oriented éS/pda crossed that of some contemporary experimental trend. In her praiseworthy book on the relationship between the pda (as well as the cinematic New Wave it gave birth to) and the partly coeval *nouveau roman* ('new novel') literary movement,[32] Dorota Ostrowska has demonstrated that they stood for two different ways of moving away from Sartrean/existentialist novelistic aesthetic, like two parallel lines that significantly intersected on a single,

28 Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 53.

29 In the English version (Rohmer, 'The Taste of Beauty', p. 71), the translator leaves this meaning completely aside, and simply renders it with 'judging films for what they are.'

30 Rohmer had no interest in the avant-garde (of any kind); his younger 'disciples', even less so. Long before Truffaut voiced their contempt for the avant-garde first in the *CC* ('La couronne noire'), Godard violently attacked avant-garde filmmaker Kenneth Anger as early as 1950 ('Que viva Mexico!').

31 This transhistorical preponderance of nature is what separated Rohmer from another film theorist whose writings substantially elaborated upon Kant's 'natural beauty': Siegfried Kracauer. The latter thought that cinema was an occasion for human beings to restore a balanced relationship with nature after the advent of technological modernity considerably perturbed it. He thus conceived modernity as a clear-cut historical break (not least in the very way man related to nature) – precisely what Rohmer firmly denied.

32 Ostrowska, *Reading the French New Wave*. The present discussion particularly refers to pp. 1-57.

very important occasion: the release of Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959).[33] To cut a long story short, in a way *nouveau roman* moved forwards, whereas the éS/pda and the New Wave moved backwards, or at least attempted to establish a significant continuity with earlier literary models (especially nineteenth-century ones) while the former embraced a (late) modernist, discontinuity-biased aesthetics. In a 1998 interview, Rohmer unsurprisingly confirmed that, in the éS and pda era, he and his friends all loved Hugo, Balzac (who, in their opinion, ranked higher than Stendhal) and nineteenth-century English and American novels, while they were against Sartre's and Beckett's existentialism, as well as against *nouveau roman*.[34]

While *nouveau roman* tried to put together, by means of writing, purer forms of spatiality and superficial visual appearance largely independent from any plot (privileging thereby writerly form as such over any traditionally narrative crystallization of time), the éS/pda (and the subsequent New Wave) still relied a lot on the 'necessary evil' of narration, not unlike classical Hollywood itself: what they were after was not a static representation of space and the visual surface of phenomena per se as crystallized by means of literary form, but a spatiality stemming from a perennial conflictual embrace with time. The éS/pda was as willing to 'go spatial' as the *nouveau roman* was, and shared more than a few aesthetic features with that trend (among others: a penchant for utter de-psychologization, deconstruction of genre conventions, and so on and so forth), but it also had little intention to give up the conflictual relationship space entertained with time (notably through narrative) as the foundation of space's preponderance itself.[35] Space is not made into an aesthetic form or object by writing techniques, but, as in the heyday of the traditional novel, depends at various levels on time's unfolding as the consciousness of the viewer/reader can perceive it. Far less experimental and formalist, more deliberately 'realist' than the *nouveau roman*, the éS/pda always remained attached to the illusory presentation of

33 Then again, Godard (in 'Hiroshima, notre amour', a roundtable discussion with Domarchi, Doniol-Valcroze, Kast, Rivette and Rohmer, p. 9) took pains to make clear that Resnais's film was *better* than the novels Robbe-Grillet, Butor, Duras and other writers variously associated with *nouveau roman* were writing at that time.

34 Rohmer interviewed by Tassone, 'Incontro con Eric Rohmer', p. 21.

35 Godard's 'spatializing narration' (as David Bordwell put it) is a good case in point. In the last chapter of his *Narration in the Fiction Film* (pp. 311-334), Bordwell described Godard's cinema as essentially a stratification of horizontal elements, thereby implicitly siding him with *nouveau roman*. However, he also hastened to add that the cause-effect temporal series known as narrative was still very much there; this robust permanence of temporality, by contrast, definitely set Godard apart from that literary trend. As for the affinities and divergences between Godard and the *nouveau roman*, see also Labarthe, 'La chance d'être femme'.

ordinary spatial appearances to the viewer/reader's consciousness through regularly narrative cinematic time.[36] The only modernism it could ever conceive was *in classicism itself*; accordingly, cinema's 'medium specificity' could only be, paradoxically, that of being more novelistic than novel itself.

As early as 1953, Rohmer openly disagreed with Conrad's definition 'Art's goal is to make you see', because 'if the novelist's sole concern were to approach the outside of an object with words and to remain outside the object, I would unquestionably prefer the least film to the best of novels, if only because, saving me from the boredom of description, it brings me into the whirlwind of action which the most beautiful prose slows down or freezes.'[37] Of course, the critic could not have had *nouveau roman* in mind when he wrote these words, simply because, at that time, it had not yet been born. Nevertheless, this passage made a distinct attack on *nouveau roman* ahead of the latter's own time. That literary trend, Rohmer would say, wrongly omitted time, whereas the éS/pda was more sensitive 'to the verb rather than to the adjective, to intention and movement more than to sensation and state.'[38] That is to say, the éS/pda thought that the predominance of 'showing' (space) over 'telling' (time) could only exist *against the background of the latter*, and not by ruling it out. Accordingly, the rest of the article tries to describe the way these two dimensions go together in the works by Howard Hawks and Robert Louis Stevenson

36 In 1963, Jean-Louis Comolli slated a book about cinema by Jean Cayrol (who belonged, to at least some extents, to the *nouveau roman* circle) and Claude Durand. 'Why yet again this obsession with the image, which they turn into the principle and the value of cinema? The image does not make the film, nor its structure, it is not even its primary element. But it is well known that writers are fascinated by it (see for instance Robbe-Grillet), so much so that they forget that cinema is more a movement of ideas than it is a movement of images, and that what can be perceived can only be the movement of the real, even within the framework of fiction'. Originally: 'Pourquoi encore cette obsession de l'image, dont ils font le principe et le prix du cinéma? L'image ne fait pas le film, ni sa structure, elle n'est pas même son élément premier. Mais on sait que les écrivains sont fascinés par elle (cf. Robbe-Grillet), au point d'oublier que le cinéma est plus un mouvement d'idées qu'un mouvement d'images, et que le sensible ne peut être, même au sein d'une fiction, que mouvement du réel.' Comolli, 'Livres de cinéma', p. 29.

37 Rohmer, 'Howard Hawks, *The Big Sky*', p. 129.

38 *Ibid.* In 1966, Rohmer made a documentary, *Le Celluloid et le marbre*, named after a series of articles he published during the course of 1955 to advocate cinema qua ultra-classical art. The film of the same name appears instead as a kind of dialectical overcoming of the opposition 'pda vs. *nouveau roman*' (modernism qua classicism vs. late literary modernism), in that he filmed in a 'realist' way the ordinary appearances of *nouveau roman writers* themselves as they explained their ideas on literature in front of the camera. By *showing* artists and theorists variously *telling* the camera the predominance of *showing* over *telling*, the mimetic and representational features of cinema reconciled, as it were, with the formalist and experimentalist ones of *nouveau roman*.

(Hawks's literary equivalent, in the critic's opinion). Characters in their films and books are revealed by the irruption of an action which is *at the same time* unexpected (thereby falling under the 'showing' category, since it is essentially a non-temporal, unprepared 'apparition' out of the blue, breaking with causal determinism) and carefully hitherto prepared by the gradual character development in time ('telling'). In a way that ostensibly recalls what was named 'the reversal between inside and outside' in the previous chapter, the sudden intrusion of discontinuity ends up appearing nonetheless justified by all the previous preparation, by the tight cause-effect texture sustaining it.

6.4. Universalism

As a rule, classicism and pretensions of universality typically gravitate towards one another. What is deemed as 'classical' is often also reputed to be universally valid in some way or another. This is very much the case with Rohmer too, who never concealed his *western-centric universalist bias*. He never had any qualms about maintaining that cinema belonged to western civilization because its technical and aesthetic properties (i.e. the fact that it externalized ordinary human vision, so to speak) made it the embodiment of the quintessentially western and Euro-centric ideal of universal natural beauty. The beauty shown by cinema (a definite outcome of the west) is a universal beauty. This seemingly problematic view[39] needs to be thought of alongside Kant's *universality of taste*: aesthetic judgements are universally valid (an object judged as beautiful is universally liable to be experienced as pleasurable), but no beautiful object can be said to be beautiful just because it complies with a definite concept pinning down its beauty in a prescriptive way. Rohmer's universality, like Kant's, is *empty*.

This issue is worth inspecting in greater detail. For one thing, it is impossible to bind Rohmer's universality to a definite geographical area, historical phase or social environment.[40] Formerly, it was Ancient Greece

39 Rohmer's conservative leaning has already been pointed out by several scholars; see for instance De Baecque and Herpe, *Eric Rohmer*, pp. 82-86.

40 The éS/pda complete lack of cultural barriers should be regarded precisely in this light. It would be a mistake to think that broader, 'Gramscian' claims regarding the dignity and importance of popular culture in the face of more highbrow works underpin the fact that a simple film artisan with no (explicit) conceptual pretensions like Howard Hawks could be considered an *auteur*, or Truffaut's deep appreciation to b-movies (openly stated in two articles included in the volume by Wheeler Winston Dixon *The Early Film Criticism of François Truffaut*, 'La neige

that had a solid grasp on universal beauty, particularly thanks to tragedies, which tackled the eternal conflict between freedom and necessity. A few centuries later (roughly from seventeenth to nineteenth century), it was France's turn:[41] 'Let's leave Aeschylus' soul free to wander worldwide and incarnate itself in thousands of unexpected aspects, and leave the twentieth century Hellenes free to learn from Maupassant.'[42] In the 1950s, it was the United States: Americans were the 'Greeks' of the twentieth century because at that moment in history their civilization was ripe enough for a classicism to emerge. Therefore, the universality of classical Hollywood,[43] tackling universal themes (typically, the conflict between will and destiny) by relying first and foremost on the plenitude and self-sufficiency of ordinary appearances (Rohmer's idea of universal beauty), was due to an historical contingency, and it had little to do with nationality per se or other related factors. 'What we like in the cinema from the New Continent is its universal reach, not the herds of its folklore.'[44] Godard echoes him: 'Might not the astonishing success of German directors in Hollywood be explained – for the benefit of our sociological critics – by the strongly international character which enabled the quest ror universality in these mystics to expand freely?'[45]

This is why Rohmer often set Hollywood's universality against 'le cinema des petites nations' ('the cinema of small nations'), minor national cinemas without a strong industrial base (ultimately, nearly every single national

n'est pas sale' and 'De A Jusqu'au Z'). All that was simply not on their agenda. Rather, those bias were due to a much more traditional belief in the universality of beauty: precisely because beauty is universal, there is no reason why it shouldn't extend (if need be) to lowbrow, purely commercial works. Of course, here one could object that this contravenes Kant's imperative that beauty should be *disinterested* and without purpose; on the other hand, for the éS/pda the properly aesthetic absence of purpose does not overlap with the lack of commercial ambitions: as we have seen in the previous chapter, someone like Hitchcock could be purely commercial and attaining purposiveness without purpose, while someone like Clouzot drowned his films in purposiveness (in deliberate effects) while having highbrow ambitions.

41 Rohmer, 'Rediscovering America', pp. 88-89. More generally, the whole article revolves around the issue being discussed in this paragraph.

42 Rohmer, 'Stella'. Originally: 'Laissons l'âme d'Eschyle vagabonder à travers le monde et s'incarner dans mille aspects inattendus et les Hellènes du XXeme siècle s'instruire dans Maupassant.'

43 Bazin, Doniol-Valcroze, Kast, Leenhardt, Rivette, Rohmer, 'Six Characters in Search of auteurs: a Discussion about the French Cinema', p. 35.

44 Rohmer, 'Rira bien...'. Originally: 'Ce que nous aimons dans le cinéma du Nouveau Continent, c'est sa portée universelle, non les hardes de son folklore.'

45 Godard, '*Strangers on a Train*', p. 25.

cinema but the United States'[46]).[47] 'What I generally like about American films, even genre films, is that they depict relations that the cinemas from different nations unjustly disregard: for instance that between power and law, or, as in the present case, the issue of authority.'[48] While Hollywood cinema tackled universal subjects (thereby bringing the viewer 'back in time 2500 years' ('2500 ans en arrière'), to Ancient Greece), reaching a global audience, the 'cinema of small nations' contented itself with occupying the slots allotted to 'national' or 'authorial' specificities in film festivals (incidentally, the éS/pda critics were generally fairly reluctant festival-goers). The problem with this kind of cinema was that it relied too much on 'these findings, ideas or inventions attesting of the presence of a personal style,'[49] and focused too much on specificities and individual differences, indulging in elaborated framings and peculiar, idiosyncratic styles, neglecting what really mattered, viz. universal themes and universal beauty.[50] A film from Greece, the 'former Hollywood' of ancient times that was now nothing but a 'small nation' creating a 'small nation cinema,' provided Rohmer with the opportunity to express his point more straightforwardly than usual: 'His characters lack of a certain dimension, that of an internal contradiction, which we find nevertheless in the most colourless hero of the most commercial western. Yet it is a Greek, if I am not mistaken, that taught us first that drama characters cannot be neither entirely guilty, nor entirely innocent.'[51] In other words, by focusing too much on the *particular* beauty of its own peculiarities, that film missed the universality of contradiction as such. It can thus be argued that an 'author cinema' was already in place (most notably in film festivals) when the pda put forward its 'policy', and *they did not like it*: they appreciated incomparably more Hollywood cinema, the

46 British cinema in particular was regularly, violently attacked by all the pda critics. See for instance: Rohmer, 'Ma vie commence en Malaisie'.

47 The rest of them basically agreed, as I argued in 'The Politics and Aesthetics of the *politique des auteurs*'.

48 Rohmer, 'Wichita'. Originally: 'Ce que j'aime en général, dans les films américains, fussent-ils de série, c'est qu'ils peignent des rapports que le cinéma des autres nations dédaignent injustement: celui par exemple de la force et du droit et, dans le cas qui nous concerne, le problème de l'autorité.'

49 Rohmer, 'Soldats inconnus'. Originally: 'Ces trouvailles, idées ou inventions qui témoignent de la présence d'un style personnel.'

50 Rohmer, 'La maison de l'ange'.

51 Rohmer, 'La fille en noir'. Originally: 'Il manque une dimension à ses personnages, celle d'une contradiction interne, que nous découvrons pourtant dans le plus falot héros du plus commercial western. C'est pourtant un Grec, si je ne me trompe, qui nous enseigna le premier que les personnages de drame ne sauraient être "ni tout à fait coupables, ni tout à fait innocents".'

constraints of industrial standardization, its impersonality, and its aesthetic universality. Only against that background the authentic originality of an *auteur* could emerge, as if mirroring in the very filmmaking process the same old conflict: will versus necessity. Therein lied the paradox: the more 'cinemas from small nations' wanted to look 'different,' the more they looked like each other,[52] while only the uniformity of classical Hollywood could enable true singularity (the *auteurs*') to emerge. Freedom could only be grounded on the conflict between it and its opposite, and not on the simple 'expression of individuality.'

One might legitimately ask, then, what filmmakers from non-western 'small nations' should do. Should they simply quit making films? Should they just imitate Hollywood cinema instead? Although some of Rohmer's writings[53] seem to suggest the latter solution, the answer is more nuanced. Japanese cinema, although not exactly a cinematic 'small nation' due to its massive film production system,[54] is a good case in point. Rohmer affirms that most Japanese films are burdened by their own aesthetic traditions: the acting style they display owes too much to nationally-rooted acting conventions (like for instance those of kabuki theatre). What Japanese films should do, according to him, is to give up these nationally-rooted conventions to embrace the western-centric universal beauty of cinema. The crucial point here is that *he does not say that they should imitate western conventions*. All they should do instead is to discard theirs, without embracing new ones in particular. It can thus be argued that 'universal beauty (whose utmost manifestation is cinema) qua a specific outcome of the west' does not mean that there is a series of western aesthetic norms that every national cinema in the world should comply with. It means that in order to attain cinematic beauty proper, films should rid themselves of *any* (western ones included) aesthetic conventions belonging to a definite national context. But what remains when a film is stripped of conventions? What remains, in Rohmer's view, is *the self-sufficient power of appearances unfolding in space and time as such*. The only reason why this *concept-less* universal beauty (the beauty of reality as 'transcendentally' perceived by the human being) is 'western' is because it has been conceptualized for the first time by Kant (even though Rohmer does not name Kant overtly, everything suggests he implies so), among others by drawing upon earlier western aesthetic reflections, such as Plato's – but this does not mean that it consists of specifically western

52 *Ibid.*

53 Rohmer, '*Aparajito* est une brillante exception qui prélude au renouveau du cinéma indien'.

54 Rohmer, 'Universalité du genie', p. 46.

features, nor that non-western national cinemas have no access to it. They do, provided that they give up everything specifically belonging to a definite context[55] – something western aesthetic tradition is automatically more inclined to do thanks to the incalculable influence exerted by Kantian aesthetics – without necessarily embracing something western beside this 'renunciation' as such. It is a kind of universality that can only be *negatively* pinned down, and not positively defined: it does not consist in a definite tradition, but in the withdrawal from *whatever* tradition. 'All roads lead to abstraction.'[56] The pda praised Kenji Mizoguchi because he rid his films of specifically Japanese acting conventions, and relied instead on pure *staging*, on spatially organizing the moving frames and the movements of the actors in them. Indeed, Mizoguchi's cinema is one of the most celebrated illustrations of the art of staging as the *universal language of cinema*.[57] Conversely, Akira Kurosawa is rejected by all the pda critics because he only tried to imitate *narrative* western conventions.

Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) is briefly mentioned in 'La revanche de l'occident' ('The Revenge of the West'), an article in which Rohmer condemns painter Paul Gauguin's exoticism as a false and flawed attempt to be faithful to a different civilization – an attempt that fails to negate the western perspective it allegedly negates, in a way that is not unlike western audiences' 'exotic' love for a western-oriented director like Kurosawa. Conversely, in the early Thirties, F.W. Murnau went to Tahiti to shoot his *Tabu* (1931) 'as a conqueror and a messenger of our own civilization.'[58] However, we should be careful not to charge Rohmer with colonialist tendencies too hastily. On the one hand, he says 'I do not know any other work from this century bearing more deeply the sign of the spirit of the West,'[59] because of the extraordinarily accomplished encounter between pictorial sensibility and natural beauty being displayed in that film. On the other hand, the article makes clear that 'to bear the sign of the West' ultimately means *to dissolve* it, to let any recognizably western feature (for instance, conventional pictorial/figurative codes) disappear into a purely visual harmony, viz. one devoid of formal codes recognizably falling under 'western art heritage.' In a Kantian vein, the triumph of western artistic beauty can only lie in its dissolution into natural beauty, that is, in the disappearance of the watchmaker in the wheels of the watch. The article ends

55 As argued, for instance, in Rohmer, 'Livres de cinéma', *CC*, 60 (June 1956).

56 Rohmer, 'Les amants crucifiés', p. 5. Originally: 'Toutes les routes mènent à l'abstraction.'

57 Besides the aforementioned 'Universalité du génie' and 'Les amants crucifiés', see also his 'Les contes de la lune vague' and Jacques Rivette's 'Mizoguchi vu d'ici'.

58 Rohmer, 'La revanche de l'occident', p. 47. My translation.

59 *Ibid*. My translation.

with a motto by Goethe: 'Everything perfect in its kind has to transcend its own kind, it must become something different and incomparable.'[60] Rather than falling into the temptations of Gauguin-like exoticism, and espousing the perspective of the non-western other just to better secretly keep one's original western bias intact, art should stick to the western perspective until it transcends it, thereby reaching the *sourcelessness* of natural beauty and vanishing into a kind of (universal) *nobody's perspective*. This applies equally to non-western and western art. One can only attain universal beauty in the western sense if one gives up any substantial reliance on recognizably particular (national, geographical, cultural, historical, formal, etc.) features – western or eastern alike. *Tabu* is not the triumph of western art in spite of its being thoroughly Polynesian, but *because* of it. Its universality lies in its being so western that it is ultimately non-western.

6.5. Authorship and mise en scène

These attempts to conciliate a universalist preference for classicism with historical contextualization are reminiscent of similar efforts undertaken in the Kantian aftermath, when such thinkers as Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe tried to articulate the imperishable greatness of antiquity and the specificities of modernity. What should also not be forgotten whenever one tackles the decisive question 'who, or what, is an *auteur* according to Rohmer?' is that that selfsame intellectual milieu (and most notably Herder and Goethe themselves) conceived a Genius primarily as somebody capable of bridging the gulf between the eternal brilliance of classicity and the historical peculiarities of modernity.

With this in mind, one can finally attempt to pin down Rohmer's seminal *auteurism*. To begin with, it must be pointed out that the critic himself never really tried to come up with a definite answer to the question 'who, or what, is an *auteur*?'[61] He made it clear, though, that an *auteur* is a film director who is well-versed in the art of *mise en scène*. Of course, this still

60 Rohmer, 'La revanche de l'occident', p. 48. My translation.

61 In his *Looks and Frictions*, Paul Willemen repeatedly pointed out that, their differences notwithstanding, éS/pda's reticence as regards a possibly steady definition of *mise en scene* was not without recalling the similar reticence by the film theorists of the 1920s to define what *photogénie* was. The link between the two is obviously appearance for appearance's sake – although, as we saw in Chapter one, Rohmer regarded cinema's increasingly realist features as a technical and historical rift irretrievably separating one from the other.

begs the question, what is *mise en scène*?[62] Rohmer never provided a clear answer. Still, in a broader, generic sense, his writings seem to imply that *mise en scène* is nothing but the art of appearance for appearance's sake, viz. the art capable to twist mechanism into beauty and freedom. And ever since the eponymous 1948 article, *mise en scène* has never ceased to be, for him, the art of *space*.

This 'art of space' is emphatically not to be confused with plastic expression. 'Cinema, an Art of Space'[63] already insisted somewhat on this distinction, which was repeated countless times from then on.[64] The éS/pda largely shared this aversion; André Bazin himself was well aware that 'his criteria [the criteria of pda's formalism] are very different from those of traditional formalism, which were above all plastic.'[65] The moving image is not 'a pleasing painting, composed according to the strict laws of plasticity and whose skilful equilibrium we only reluctantly allow ourselves to destroy,'[66] because, above all, it has to *move*. Laws of pictorial and sculptural composition (far more valued by Ricciotto Canudo, Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein and other French film critics and theorists from the 1920s[67]) are of little

62 Countless different answers have been given to this question in the past few decades. For a rich overview of many of them, see Martin, *Mise en Scène and Film Style*, or Kessler, *Mise en scène*.

63 'Cinema an Art of Space' started with the elucidation that the sense of space is 'not to be confused with a pictorial sense or a simple visual sensibility' (p. 19). The 'plastic expression' (p. 20) has *nothing* to do with cinema's spatial bias. The 'art of space' is not (or not necessarily) a matter of organizing shapes and volumes in an eye-pleasing way. 'From our point of view, the most valid films are not those with the most beautiful pictures, and the collaboration of a genius cameraman cannot ensure that a film will depict an original view of the world' (p. 22). It is no accident that the piece ends with Rossellini's *Paisan* (*Paisà*, 1946), whose 'richness in spatial expression – one very different from the distortions of the plastic arts' (p. 28) depends on having invented methods that 'are much less apparent than they were twenty years ago' (p. 28). 'Cinema, an Art of Space' also mentions Sergei Eisenstein, a director who is easily liable to suspicions of 'plastic expression', but who cannot really be charged with such an accusation because he, as a rule, bands together time (that is, movement) and space. 'We should emphasize that the vanishing of lines along one or two dominant directions, the swelling of diagonals, always takes place *in the direction of movement* and organizes the principal planes along which the surfaces slide into the shot. In this way the shot is constantly saved from aestheticism' (p. 24). The risk of plastic expression for plastic expression's sake is avoided because a system of vectors is not just spatially represented, but gradually given life *on the basis of time* (that is, movement).

64 See, for instance (among others): 'The Art of Caricature: Tashlin', p. 151; Rohmer, 'Renoir's Youth', p. 188; Rohmer, 'Hommes et loups'; Rohmer, 'Sans famille'.

65 Excerpt from a letter by Bazin to Georges Sadoul quoted in De Baecque, *La Cinéphilie*, p. 184. Originally: 'Ses critères [the criteria of éS/pda's formalism] sont très différents de ceux du formalisme traditionnel qui étaient surtout plastiques.'

66 Rohmer, 'Reflections on Colour', p. 40.

67 This was rightly pointed out by, among others, René Prédal in his *La critique de cinéma*, p. 98.

use in cinema, because they limit and thwart the unfolding of movement, unquestionably cinema's primary element.[68] This is why Vincente Minnelli, a director whose films are replete with plastic preciosities, is usually snubbed by Rohmer and by the éS/pda in general (whereas other *CC* critics, like Jean Domarchi, regarded him as an outstanding *auteur*).[69] Several other directors are condemned because their films are too often static; among them, Luis Buñuel ('Luis Buñuel: The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz'). Moreover, in the issue (#31, January 1954) of the *CC* dedicated for the most part to the then-new invention of cinemascope,[70] Rohmer and the others unsurprisingly insisted somewhat on the spatial possibilities granted by the new technique, which could make it much easier for filmmakers to create a sense of spatial continuity; however, this continuity was not pursued just for the sake of it, but also to allow actors (and the camera itself) to *move more freely*.[71] The importance of cinemascope, in other words, did not lie in the framing, much less in its plastic potential, but rather in the fact that it facilitated motion within the frame.

The art of space, the art of 'manifestation' as opposed to 'expression', is that which conveys whatever should be conveyed in a film through space. In Andrzej Wajda's *Kanal* (1957), 'the one and only great "idea" of such film is a spatial and concrete fact, and it is because the symbol is never made explicit that it conserves its power. This subterranean and nauseous labyrinth, this sort of Styx, doesn't need words to prove its eloquence.'[72] The underground tunnels trapping the characters are a perfect metaphor of human condition without ever needing to be a metaphor and to say something in the first

68 This point was also stated in Rohmer, 'Such Vanity is Painting', p. 49.

69 See, for instance: Domarchi, 'Monsieur Vincente'; Rohmer, 'Thé et sympathie'; Rohmer, 'Gigi'; Domarchi, 'Juste un rêve'.

70 In addition to that issue (partially translated in Jim Hillier's *Cahiers du Cinéma. The 1950s*), a similar emphasis on the *kinetic* virtues of cinemascope can be found in Rohmer, 'La croisée des destins'; Rohmer, 'Le temps d'aimer, le temps de mourir'; Truffaut, 'Les nègres de la rue blanche'. Jim Hillier ('Introduction') fittingly compared the *CC* special issue on cinemascope with the similar one by British movie magazine *Sight and Sound*: the latter particularly focused on the plastic drawbacks of that technique, whereas the criteria used by the former to assess it had nothing to do with the plastic dimension proper.

71 By contrast, *Thérèse Etienne* (Denys de la Patellière, 1958) was condemned because it used Cinemascope in the wrong way, i.e. in order to put together fixed, generally static shots instead of letting the actors move more freely; in this case then, plastic expression and the representation of a static space were wrongly preferred to the dynamic construction of a space through time and movement. Rohmer, 'Thérèse Etienne'.

72 Rohmer, 'Kanal'. Originally: 'La grande, la seule "idée" de ce film est une donnée spatiale, concrète et c'est parce que le symbole n'est jamais explicité qu'il conserve sa force. Ce labyrinthe souterrain et nauséabond, cette manière de Styx, n'a nul besoin du verbe pour corroborer son éloquence.'

place. The same goes for the final forward travelling shot wrapping up the film and showing the Vistula river from behind the bars the characters cannot trespass. No trace of the idea beside the *exclusively* spatial means it is conveyed by.

Similarly, Rohmer praised those films where environment and landscape directly take part in the unfolding of the drama; in a western picture, he appreciated 'this fugitive driven back to the river by a herd of horses which kept the killers under cover, or the one hiding with his mount behind a block of rocks, this duel with rifles on the crest of a hill, and this piton which they disintegrated with gun shots so as to break the enemy's back.'[73] In another western, the hero is trying to catch some bandits hiding in a cave. After having reached the top of the cave, he sets fire on one of the two sides of the cave; then, by taking advantage of the ensuing smoke, he goes in the opposite direction and waits for the bandits (intrigued by the smoke) to come out so that he can shoot them on their backs. This finding 'is well worth this refined spotlight effect, or that clever crane movement.'[74]

Indeed, Rohmer radically distinguished *mise en scène* from technical preciosity and style.[75] Unlike the latter, *mise en scène* is *unobtrusive*, and as a rule *conceals* its presence. It is not a matter of fade-outs, ellipses and rapid countershots, but of a certain sense of space and place.[76] In the film from which the latest example was taken, 'the happiest inventions aren't particularly due to framing but more to gesture and positioning: in fact, the ones of the latter kind are given prominence almost without us realizing, by means of an uncommon expertise in framing, whereby the decor is always fully "there", familiar, well-oriented.'[77] In short, the framing shows us all we need to see, so that we always have an adequate grasp of what is going on, but with no emphasis at all on compositional virtuosity. Frame composition and movements therein should be carefully pre-determined, but *invisibly* so, without graphic redundancy, in order to deliver an unobtrusive

73 Rohmer, 'La fureur des hommes'. Originally: 'Ce fugitif acculé à la rivière par une horde de chevaux à l'abri desquels se dissimulent les tueurs, ou bien se cachant avec sa monture derrière un bloc de rochers, ce duel au fusil sur la crete de la colline et ce piton désagrégé à coups de feu pour fracasser les reins de l'adversaire.'

74 Rohmer, 'Du sang dans le désert'. Originally: '[Il] vaut bien tel effet raffiné de projecteur, tel savant mouvement de grue.'

75 See, for instance Rohmer, 'Castigat ridendo...', p. 38.

76 Rohmer, 'Loin de Griffith', p. 43.

77 Rohmer, 'Du sang dans le désert'. Originally: 'Les plus heureuses inventions ne sont pas tant de cadrage que de geste et de position: celle-ci, il est vrai, mises en évidence, mais presque à notre insu, par une science rare du cadre, grâce à laquelle le décor nous est toujours bien présent, familier, orienté.'

articulation of the temporal sequence of deeds forming the action, through the articulation of spatial elements (the cave, the smoke and so on). Yet, one should be careful not to understand the word 'spatial' too narrowly. 'Space' here means, very broadly, 'anything endowed with an extension taking place within moving images.' The direction of actors is thus by no means ruled out – on the contrary, this 'invisible' craft, displaying no figurative brilliance, is undoubtedly among the *mise en scène* tools the éS/pda paid most attention to.[78]

Accordingly, the *auteur* is not at all required to boastfully affirm his presence in the images; more often than not, the opposite is true, and he is more appreciated when he is invisible, barely detectable in the texture of the film. 'It may even be from the meagreness of their inventiveness that people like Bresson or Rossellini draw the rigour and novelty of their style.'[79] Rohmer even wrote that the best way to be a film *auteur* lies in 'vanishing behind the characters' ('s'effacer derrière ses personnages').[80]

In other words, Rohmer contrasted the properly modern idea of authorship as 'self-expression', with one that was most fully fleshed out in the Kantian aftermath, viz. one whose self-proclaimed modernity lied in the re-establishment of the eternal values of classicity (soberness, harmonious restraint and so on and so forth) by different, more up-to-date means – that is to say, by *cinematic* means, by appearance for appearance's sake. In December 1959, in the middle of the explosion of the New Wave, when several new directors debuted behind the camera to (so the story goes) 'express their personality', he went against the grain:

> During its existence, cinema has been able to maintain a definite objectivity, owing to its own powers and also its limitations. The conquest of subjectivity, if it cannot be condemned in advance, may represent only a kind of suicidal victory. For here, film can do nothing less than conform to the models provided by the other arts, arts that are better equipped in this regard. Even if cinema manages to beat them in this area, will it avoid being contaminated by the illness that today plagues almost all of them? We should therefore praise Renoir for declaring war, in his interviews and conferences, on *subjectivity*, just as he did on those of *psychology*.[81]

78 See, for instance Rohmer, 'The Quintessence of the Genre: Cukor', p. 156; Rohmer, 'Politics against Destiny', pp. 162-163; Rohmer, 'Révélations suédoises'.

79 Rohmer, 'Isou or Things as They Are', p. 57.

80 Rohmer, 'Crime et châtiment', p. 3.

81 Rohmer, 'Renoir's Youth', pp. 191-192.

This topic is crucial, and will be dealt with in greater detail in the follow-up book of the present research. For now, it is important to stress that the *auteur*'s self-effacement is not so far from what has previously been called 'the missing genius of natural beauty.' By concealing his presence, the self-effacing *auteur* makes it easier for the sourcelessness of moving images (that is, of their 'purposiveness without purpose') to emerge. In other words, the filmmaker should effectively give up the intention to drift from ordinary perception through interpretation, and be instead devoted to putting together moving images seemingly untouched by human intervention while concealing therein artistic contribution nonetheless; the filmmaker is expected to somehow instil some purposiveness without purpose in it – and *seemingly invisibly so*. 'This awareness of what is limitless, or, if you prefer, of the infinite, can be found in the cinema in the feeling of absolute autonomy of nature, which however, on the other hand, we dominate by the power we are given to get straight to the heart of appearances – not the least paradox of this art where the refusal to produce art is elevated to first and leading principle.'[82] This is precisely what makes Nicholas Ray a 'colourist' rather than a mere 'plastic artist'.[83] Conversely, Vincent Minnelli's film about Van Gogh (*Lust for Life*, 1956) misunderstands the relationship between cinema and the genius, because it chooses to faithfully visualize his paintings in a *tableau vivant* fashion instead of emphasizing the *fundamental discord* between the properly plastic eye of the artist and the eye of the movie camera.[84]

This is what the young, somewhat Rohmerian Jacques Rivette has to say about Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1949), a disappointing film from a director he had hugely admired:

> What does the literary hack look for on the screen, if not the imposition of the expression of a 'personal worldview'? Such presumptuousness, however, is likely to carry along the seeds of its own retribution. The expression of this view, however striking and personal it may be, could only be effective in compliance with laws it would be dangerous to deny:

82 Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, pp. 109-110. Originally: 'Cette conscience de l'illimité, ou, si l'on veut, de l'infini, nous la retrouvons, au cinéma, dans le sentiment de l'autonomie absolue de la nature, que pourtant, d'une autre manière, nous dominons par le pouvoir qui nous est imparti de tailler dans le vif des apparences: ce qui n'est pas le moindre paradoxe de cet art où le refus de faire de l'art est érigé en premier principe directeur.'

83 Rohmer, 'Ajax or the Cid?', p. 112.

84 Rohmer, 'Vincent Van Gogh', p. 4. Traces of a productive discord between the all too aware eye of the filmmaker and the passive, inert resistance of nature can be found in 'La mort en ce jardin', his review of Luis Buñuel's *Death in the Garden* (*La mort en ce jardin*, 1956).

> one has to risk invisibility. Filmmakers must know how to respect what they shoot, and to submit to their subject matters; they cannot just play with them. The demiurge who is slave of his own creation cannot glance flippantly over it without danger; may he refuse to adopt the point of view of Sirius; may he refuse then any presumptuous affirmation of the I, and may he practice humility in front of this universe that fails to belong to him and slips off his hands to gravitate freely. [...] Never had true personality had a greater chance to come to the fore than in impersonality; you have to lose yourself in order to find yourself in a purer fashion, like some imitate in order to ascertain their uniqueness. 'He who wants to save his soul shall lose it'; he who wants to prove to oneself denies himself; he who wants to affirm himself conceals himself.[85]

Moreover, Rohmer overtly referenced Kant's 'final ends' (summarized in one of the previous chapters) and the Kantian analogy between the artist and God. Here is how he replied to film critic Barthélemy Amengual, one of the first to accuse the pda of neglecting the contributions of other film professionals (the editor, the cinematographer and so on and so forth) and of wrongly glorifying the film director alone, as the exclusive responsible of film's aesthetic achievement: 'The world of aesthetic creation is a world of final causes, led by an autocratic will. Isn't the idea of God qua Watchmaker, of a demiurge, borrowed from art?'[86] The *auteur* is not the direct, genesis-like source of what is valuable in a film. The stones of a building, says Rohmer in the same text, are not produced by its architect. Rather, the *auteur* is a mere name standing (at one and the same time) for the freedom of the subject, for the disregard of cause-effect mechanics (that is, of efficient causes),

85 Rivette, 'Les malheurs d'Orphée', pp. 1-2. Originally: 'Que prétend le littérateur à l'écran, sinon nous imposer l'expression d'une "vision personnelle" du monde? Tant d'outrecuidance risque fort de porter en elle-même les germes de son châtiment. L'expression même de cette vision, si attachante et personnelle soit-elle, ne saurait être efficace qu'au sein de lois qu'il serait assez dangereux de nier: on s'expose à l'invisibilité. Le cinéaste doit savoir respecter ce qu'il filme, et se soumettre à son objet; le jeu est interdit. Le démiurge esclave de sa création, ne saurait sans périls la survoler négligemment; qu'il se refuse à prendre sur elle le point de vue de Sirius; qu'il refuse ainsi toute affirmation outrecuidante du moi, et s'exerce à l'humilité, devant cet univers qui cesse de lui appartenir et s'échappe de ses mains pour graviter librement. [...] Jamais la véritable personnalité n'eût plus de chance de se faire jour que dans l'impersonnalité; et, comme certain copie pour se prouver original, perds-toi toi-même aussi pour te retrouver plus pur. "Qui veut sauver son âme la perd"; qui veut se prouver se dénie; s'affirmer, se dissimule.'

86 Rohmer, 'Les lecteurs des *Cahiers* et la Politique des auteurs', p. 55. Originally: 'L'univers de la création esthétique est un monde de causes finales, régi par une volonté autocratique. L'idée d'un Dieu horloger, d'un démiurge n'est-elle pas empruntée à l'art?'

and for a global vision underlying the film(s) (its final cause): a vision that cannot be reduced to the interaction between the single parts of the film(s), but on which their proper aesthetic functioning is nonetheless based. In this sense, film is an organism whose global concept exceeds the sum of its parts, and the *auteur* stands for this global concept. 'Even if he doesn't change a single comma in the script, the "director" of the film is still a little bit its author, if only because of the discretionary power he exerts over the enterprise as a whole.'[87]

It can be argued that in the éS years, largely under the impulsion of Rohmer's classicism-oriented and universalist approach, authorial self-effacement indeed played a big role in these critics' conception of authorship – even though the latter had not yet become the main argument presented in their aesthetic policy. As the years went by, the pda would increasingly emphasize the affirmation of authorial personalities; nevertheless, as will be shown in the forthcoming second part of the present study, the pda *never gave up the idea that a strongly dialectical relationship existed between personality and impersonality*. For the éS as well as the pda, authorial personality and impersonality are two sides of the same coin, and should be thought of together. To some extent, the éS tended to side more with impersonality while the pda more with personality, but ultimately they were both after a very similar aesthetic ideal, and in either case the opposite counterpart was never very far. Which is one more reason to believe that the pda can be fully understood only alongside the indispensable preparatory phase when the same critics formed an informal group that once Pierre Kast named éS.

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87 Rohmer, 'Le bourgeois gentilhomme'. Originally: 'Même s'il ne change pas une virgule du scénario, le "réalisateur" du film est tout un petit peu son auteur, ne serait-ce que par le pouvoir discrétionnaire qu'il exerce sur l'ensemble de l'entreprise.'

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Abbreviations

CC = *Cahiers du Cinéma*

éS = *école Schérer*

GoG = Tom Milne (ed. and trans.), *Godard on Godard*. London and New York: Da Capo, 1972.

pda = *politique des auteurs*

ToB = Jean Narboni and Eric Rohmer (eds.), *The Taste of Beauty*, trans. by Carol Volk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Conclusion

Grosoli, Marco, *Eric Rohmer's Film Theory (1948-1953). From 'école Schérer' to 'Politique des auteurs'*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

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Abstract
This chapter recapitulates the book's main points, and summarizes the main theoretical assumptions underlying Rohmer's early film criticism. Ultimately, those assumptions would decisively influence the younger critics who later established the *politique des auteurs*, as shown in Chabrol's and Rohmer's monograph on Alfred Hitchcock, customarily regarded as the *politique*'s ripest fruit. Indeed, that book (also extensively tackled in this chapter) portrays Hitchcock's cinema as one that epitomizes (through the recurring 'transfer of guilt' theme running through most of his films) the *externality of consciousness* that Sartre never quite managed to properly theorize in his philosophy. In Rohmer's and Chabrol's eyes, Hitchcock's films thus stood for an utter negation of Sartre's all too literary approach, which they (and by extension the *politique des auteurs* overall) perceived as inadequate to account for cinema's specificities.

Keywords: Rohmer, Chabrol, Hitchcock, transfer, guilt, conclusion

By having a handful of young cinephiles gather around him, Eric Rohmer found himself at the head of an *école* (a 'school'), without really wanting it, much less trying to establish a well-defined ideological, aesthetic and/or critical movement or trend. Nevertheless, the half-unstated convergence of tastes and ideas that took place in the late 1940s and in the early 1950s among Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer and Truffaut, mainly under the influence of the oldest among them, and that by drawing upon Pierre Kast's 1952 nickname can be called *école Schérer* (éS), decisively laid the foundations for the *politique des auteurs* (pda) to emerge later. A flash-forward to 1957 might help to clarify the extent to which the éS early phase was essential to the formation of the pda – although a fully fleshed-out portrayal of the latter will only be drawn in the follow-up book of the present research.

In the 1950s, the éS/pda only published one book-length monograph about a film director: Claude Chabrol's and Eric Rohmer's *Hitchcock: The*

First Fourty-Four Films. One should not overlook the context surrounding that publication. In 1957, the pda was impressively gaining momentum, after Truffaut's much discussed 1954 pamphlet 'A Certain Tendency of French Cinema' afforded him and his friends significant public attention. Thus, to publish a monograph on a single, specific *auteur* at that time amounted to *making a statement*: it was a matter of choosing, shaping and consolidating their own identity and recognizability vis-a-vis the public eye. In other words, that monograph could not but be an undeclared *manifesto of the pda*. Accordingly, its subject matter could not be just any director: it could only be a director whose personal poetics strongly resonated with the innermost assumptions and premises of the pda. Not just an *auteur*, but somebody embodying like no other what a director should be in order to be an *auteur*.

André Bazin had no problem admitting that Hitchcock was *the* pda's tailor-made filmmaker.[1] He had been critical of both the pda and the English master for approximately the same reason:[2] both were guilty of shallow *formalism*,[3] of neglecting the 'what' (films' subject matter) for the sake of the 'how' (formal brilliance) – indeed an unforgivable sin for someone, like Bazin, who bestowed the utmost importance on the inseparability of *la forme* ('form') and *le fond* ('matter'). However, Bazin's charge should be taken with a grain of salt, as it is perhaps fairly inexact. The young Turks themselves often accused other directors of being shallow formalists.[4] And the main thesis of the Hitchcock book is precisely that the English master had achieved the most perfect coincidence between form and matter.

This Bazin-pda complex diatribe about formalism will not be disentangled in these pages. It appears, though, that their divergence ultimately came down to a different way of conceiving what 'matter' could stand for. It seems that, for Bazin, a film could legitimately deal with just any subject (social, historical, merely escapist, scientific – whatever), provided that it was matched with a suitable, appropriate form, whereas the pda tended to privilege those films and *auteurs* that were deemed compatible with, and found an appropriate

1 Bazin ('Livres de cinéma') made reference to this reciprocal affinity in his own review of the monograph by Chabrol and Rohmer.

2 See in particular Bazin, 'On the *politique des auteurs*' and 'How Could You Possibly Be a Hitchcocko-Hawksian?'.

3 Claude Chabrol ('Les petits sujets'), for instance, maintained that Hitchcock's command of cinematic form was so high that the subjects of his films were basically irrelevant: no matter how lousy and insignificant the subject of a film was, the English director was capable, according to the French critic, to turn it into a masterpiece exclusively thanks to the way he played with cinematic form.

4 For instance, Billy Wilder: Rohmer, 'Ariane'.

form for, the cloud of fairly unspoken ideological and aesthetic concerns that was sketched in the previous chapters, and that came into focus primarily in the early years when neither the *politique des auteurs* label, nor the 'A Certain Tendency of French Cinema' manifesto had appeared yet; that is to say, in the years of the éS. For these critics, 'formalism' came along only when a director abused formal brilliance for the sake of a subject unrelated to their 'cloud'.

In this respect, Hitchcock was indeed the epitome of a pda *auteur*. In order to understand why, we shall immediately introduce the central theme around which, according to Chabrol and Rohmer, the whole of Hitchcock's cinema revolves: the *transfer of guilt*. According to this very Catholic idea, the whole of humanity is marked by original sin, by an 'innate defect of the universe,'[5] 'the *interchangeable guilt* of all mankind.'[6] Guilt is *structurally* inside of man: man cannot help but be guilty. Precisely because guilt is inherent and inscribed in human condition as such, guilt *is not personal* ('it does not depend upon the evilness of the characters'[7]). This means that a person can be guilty for absolutely contingent, external reasons that have nothing to do with inner consciousness. Accordingly, guilt literally *floats on the surface*, being passed from one character to the other.

> [*Blackmail* (1929)] focuses on the relationships among the characters. Victims and victimizers alternate from sequence to sequence: the victimizer becomes the victim, the victim the victimizer. In the same scene, sometimes in a single shot, the moral positions of the protagonists shift. Take, for example, the short scene between the blackmailer and the detective: the latter is on the right; then, when to save his fiancee the detective in turn suggests an ignoble bargain to the blackmailer, he places himself on the left of the frame. The position of the characters expresses their relationship. This touch is really 'pure Hitchcock.[8]

Salvation (i.e. *freedom*) lies in the acknowledgement of the utter externality of morality, viz. in voluntarily assuming as one's own the moral unbalance (the guilt) one is bestowed upon from without and from the outside. In other words, it lies in taking responsibility for what one is *not* responsible for, not least by means of the utterly exterior rites known as *sacraments*, such as *confession*.[9]

5 Chabrol and Rohmer, *Hitchcock*, p. 74.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 149.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
9 This occurs, for instance, when Ingrid Bergman delivers her character's monologue in *Under Capricorn* (1949) (pp. 102-103), or in the ending of *The Paradine Case* (1947) (p. 89).

The turn of phrase 'to take responsibility for what one is not responsible for' may legitimately sound like a strange inversion of Sartre's 'ethics of responsibility'. Indeed, the moral dimension Chabrol and Rohmer want to highlight in Hitchcock's oeuvre is every bit anti-Sartrean. They counter the idea of freedom as groundless with the idea that the very ground of freedom is the original sin: freedom arises not when one assumes responsibility for one's own freedom, but when one deliberately assumes responsibility for a guilt *that is not one's own*. The criminal uncle of *Shadow of a Doubt* (1948), saying that 'the world is a foul sty' and charging the world 'with the responsibility he is unwilling to assume'[10] is literally in Sartrean *bad faith*; Rohmer's point, however, is that *his totally innocent young niece too is in bad faith* until she acknowledges her fascination for her evil uncle. In other words: to presume that one is innocent already means to be in bad faith: the only real way out of bad faith is to acknowledge the original sin. Only then, is the cynicism of, say, Clouzot's *The Wages of Fear* evaded; only by postulating a universal culpability does one feel involved in the evil world outside instead of feeling superior and detached from it.

Approximately the same point is made with regards to *Rear Window*. Everything that happens in the apartments on which Jeff spies from his own room 'happens as though they were the projections of the voyeur's thoughts – or desires; he will never be able to find in them more than he had put there, more than he hopes for or is waiting for.'[11] Courted by Lisa, a woman he is not interested in and who takes care of him in his own flat after an accident compelled him to temporarily use a wheelchair, he spies on the life of those who live in front of his apartment, but all that he finds there are refractions of his own solitude. 'Their solitude echoes that of the spinster resolutely seeking escape in fantasy, that of the childless couple, that of the young newlyweds submerged in the sexual passion of the first days of marriage.'[12]

Rohmer regards *Rear Window* as a critique of self-centred, egoistical solitude. It is easy to realize that this 'solitude' is really Sartre's for-itself consciousness, even if the critic does not mention it: Jeff, the voyeur spying on his neighbours, stands for a consciousness being reflected *both* in the external objects it is conscious of (at some point Jeff becomes aware that his spying has effects on the life 'out there') *and* in itself as separate, autonomous consciousness (Jeff invisibly sitting in his apartment). 'In short, each of

10 Chabrol and Rohmer, *Hitchcock*, p. 73.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 126.
12 *Ibid.*

the characters – protagonists or those playing a minor role – is enclosed not only in the cell of his apartment, but in the stubborn satisfaction of something which when seen externally, partially, and from afar can only appear ludicrous';[13] yet, 'each of these people will drink the cup of his egoism down to the lees.'[14] Solitude is first posited, and then overcome and refuted – and so is for-itself consciousness, implicitly being proved untenable. For Rohmer and Chabrol, solitude is inseparable from the supposition of oneself as innocent – a supposition 'in bad faith,' as per Sartre. In contrast to this supposition, Jeff ends up feeling concerned and even guilty with regards to what he sees from an allegedly detached position, thereby confirming the truth of 'original sin.'[15] This Jeff-neighbours correlation mirrors the one between Jeff and the spectator: 'He waits, hoping that events will justify his deductions [that one of his neighbours has killed his wife]. We wait, hoping along with him. In a manner of speaking, the crime is desired by the man who expects to make of his discovery his supreme delectation, the very sense of his life. The crime is desired by us, the spectators, who fear nothing so much as seeing our hopes deceived.'[16] Both Jeff and the spectator not only see, but desire as they see. 'We are constantly splitting ourselves in two while the protagonist of the film splits himself in two, constantly identifying with him while he is identifying with the man he is spying on.'[17] Hence, we are never innocent, because (like Charlie the niece in the other film) we are never really detached. *To presume oneself separate*[18] *already means to be guilty*: Rohmer seems to identify the emergence of for-itself consciousness itself (Sartre's nihilation; Jeff's isolation in his apartment) not only *inherently* in bad faith, but also coincident with the original sin (a coincidence Sartre would never condone), in that nihilation qua original phenomenon of consciousness disavows something by all means more original, namely the void of self-consciousness and its ensuing being nothing but something floating within external perception. Jeff 'nihilates' because he refuses to be nothing but the object of Lisa's love ('turning his back to the true sun, the photographer loses the ability to look Being in the face'[19]).

13 *Ibid.*, p. 127.
14 *Ibid.*
15 *Ibid.*, p. 128.
16 *Ibid.*, p. 125.
17 *Ibid.*, p. 124.
18 Balestrero's fault in *The Wrong Man* lies precisely in a self-indulgent victimization whereby he pictures himself as the undeserving victim of an adverse fate (p. 149) – which is just another way of removing oneself from the picture rather than acknowledging one's inclusion.
19 Chabrol and Rohmer, *Hitchcock*, p. 126.

Rohmer seems to imply that Sartre's perspective is unable to account for the need to overcome the basic impasse of his ontology by acknowledging the utter externality of consciousness, its total lack of any autonomous substance identifiable by means of self-reflection (not even that of the 'fundamental project'). And although Rohmer does not really explain why *Rear Window* should be 'a reflexive, critical work in the Kantian sense of the word,'[20] he probably meant that, for him, that film corroborated the idea that self-consciousness can only be found in apperception, specifically, in the 'I think' accompanying every apperception. This film shows that a subject cannot really pursue nihilation, because he finds himself, his own desire, his own gaze, always already out there in the visual field. In (at least) this respect, Rohmer's reading curiously resonates with the one by Miran Božovič,[21] who (in the wake of Jacques Lacan) interpreted the film as a subversion of Sartre's 'game of musical chair' between Self and Other.

In *Huis Clos*, guilt *does not circulate*. 'Guilt', in that play, was none other than each character's 'fundamental project', the particular temporalization his or her for-itself consciousness had consisted of during the character's lifetime. Because of their 'projects', and more precisely of the incapability of those people to responsibly cope with them (in short: because of their 'bad faith'), they have all been condemned to stay in that room forever. True enough, here too the consciousness of each character is external: it cannot be accessed through self-reflection, but only emerges thanks to the intersubjective play with the other characters; it is not in the way each character sees himself or herself, but in the way he or she is regarded by the others. However, the whole point of the play is that each character remains prisoner of his or her own guilt *through* the others: all the others' consciousnesses do is to nail down each consciousness to its definite guilt. Each subject is entirely defined by intersubjectivity, *but that's it*, there can be nothing else than the endless reversal between subject and object, self and other. Hence, everyone in *Huis Clos* is stuck in his or her own 'solitude', as Rohmer put it in his piece on *Rear Window*, *because* of intersubjectivity the way Sartre conceives it. In contrast therewith, Hitchcock conceives guilt in *formal* terms. That is to say, he endows guilt with a visual vividness whereby it is palpably distinguished from the intersubjective level of mere interaction among characters. He makes it an object (or, at least, a visually discernible 'something') so that it can circulate among characters without being confused with their subjectivities. In *Rear Window*, the cigarette

20 *Ibid.*, p. 124.

21 Božovič, 'The Man behind its Own Retina'.

glowing in the total darkness of the murderer's room,[22] suggesting his lurking presence as the unseen smoker, *is* Jeff's consciousness out there in Jeff's own visual field:[23] it confronts him with the fact that 1) Jeff himself, like the smoking murderer, keeps himself hidden from view, and 2) the murderer's desire (that of killing his wife) is also his own (that of getting rid of Lisa). Jeff's consciousness is defined by something external, but not by some intersubjective determination: *no subject* gets in touch with Jeff in this regard. Actually, later in the film, the murderer does 'return his gaze', effectively qualifying as Jeff's 'Other' in the Sartrean sense: he bursts into Jeff's room, asks him 'what do you want from me?', grabs a camera and takes a picture of Jeff. By this very gesture, though, Sartre's 'game of musical chairs' is refuted: the camera 's flash produces a huge red stain in the visual field which cannot but strike the eye as *the purely formal correlative of the cigarette previously glowing in the dark*. As such, it confirms that guilt circulates in a purely visual way. Moreover, after a scuffle, the murderer dangles Jeff out of his window by his feet: in other words, Jeff becomes an object in his own visual field. Thereby, the infernal solitude of *Huis Clos* is broken. Jeff finds himself involved in the visual field he only used to contemplate from a detached position.

Rear Window could thus be seen as a systematic, downright rebuttal of *Huis Clos*. The latter stages an intersubjective triumph of solitude for the sake of a lone voyeur secretly reassured of his or her solitude by way of that spectacle of intersubjectivity, watched while sitting among the audience, in front of the stage. *Rear Window*, based on a no less theatrical spatial arrangement (the apartments in front of Jeff's window are, rather graphically, so many 'stages') breaks this spell *by showing the spectator himself* (Jeff) finding himself *involved* in the intersubjective triumph of solitude he sees. As he is confronted with the fact that his own guilt (his unconfessed desire to get rid of Lisa) is also somebody else's, and thus that guilt/self-consciousness is something circulating externally, he accomplishes that which the characters of *Huis Clos* were never capable of doing: to assume

22 In 'Les choses sérieuses', his review of the same film (upon which the *Rear Window* chapter of the 1957 monograph co-written with Rohmer would extensively draw), Claude Chabrol singles out the sequence of the dog's death (with the glowing cigarette of the murderer from behind the window) as the one connecting together the inherent impossibility of innocence and the theme of solitude. He also argues that Hitchcock himself indirectly suggested that that was the key scene of the entire film, as it was the one and only moment when the camera left both Jeff and his room.

23 This idea, and more generally the whole of this paragraph, is heavily indebted to Božovič's 'The Man Behind Its Own Retina'.

that one's self-consciousness is *effectively* nothing (as opposed to engaging with others only to reassure the self, that is, the 'fundamental project' whose disavowal amounts to bad faith), viz. nothing but an object in somebody else's visual field. The latter is precisely the reason why he finally gives in to Lisa's love for him. Jeff overcomes his guilt, i.e. the 'bad faith' of his unconfessed desire to get rid of her, by acknowledging that this desire is not his own, but circulates externally.[24] Thereby, nothing remains of his self-consciousness *but* a mere appearance in the eyes of somebody else (Lisa).

Ultimately, Hitchcock is an *auteur* because he shows that, against the residual 'Cartesian' substantiality of reflexive for-itself consciousness, *consciousness is wholly outside*. The transfer of guilt is the perpetual transmigration of consciousness taking place entirely over the surface: what men carry along inside themselves is completely beside the point. This aspect is distinctly echoed in Rohmer's recurrent refrain that cinema reveals 'not the troubled zones of the libido, but the broad daylight of consciousness,'[25] seemingly implying that (on the screen at least) there are no 'depths of the unconscious' belonging to subjects, beyond that which is manifested on the surface. Years before his monograph, Rohmer already described the way emotion circulated, as it were, from one face to the other in *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), and added that depth, in his works, was precisely to be found in such surface effects.[26] The scene of the death of Mr. Memory in *The 39 Steps* (1935) provides a very precise illustration of the *intimate foreignness* of consciousness, almost a cutting parody of intimacy: 'Here, in fact, Hitchcock shows us the mechanism of confession and how it works. Burdened with a bothersome and tormenting knowledge (it is absurd and ridiculous: an incomprehensible physics formula), Mr. Memory, after having recited it as though he were vomiting it up, dies saying, "I'm glad it's off my mind".'[27] A likewise externality is suggested by

24 Tellingly, one of the films by the English master that Rohmer and Chabrol like the least is *Lifeboat* (1943), one that, like *Huis Clos*, is almost exclusively set in an enclosed space (a lifeboat). But although the moral implications developed by Hitchcock in his film retain (not unlike *Huis Clos*) 'an overly literary aspect', placing 'insufficient faith in the innate power of cinema' (that is, in appearance for appearance's sake) (Chabrol and Rohmer, *Hitchcock*, p. 78), the two critics ultimately appreciate his efforts, because through one of the characters (the German, 'the catalyst of the reaction', p. 77) the guilts of every other character gathered on the lifeboat end up being graphically externalized and problematically transcended and redeemed. The German is, in other words, the externalization of everyone's guilts, whereas there is nothing of the sort in *Huis Clos*. In the latter, guilt is individual *and* intersubjective, in *Lifeboat* it is collective *and* objective, insofar as it is embodied by a definite entity whose individuation transcends the level of a merely intersubjective designation.

25 Rohmer, 'Land of Miracles', p. 207.

26 Rohmer, 'Le soupçon', p. 65.

27 Chabrol and Rohmer, *Hitchcock*, p. 43.

the way Hitchcock uses subjective shots in *The Wrong Man*: 'Though we see things with Balestrero's own eyes (when the handcuffs are put on and there is a suggestion of his shoulder, or when he dare not look at the prisoners alongside him and sees only a row of feet on the floor of the black maria), the protagonist remains outside us, *just as he is outside himself*'[28] (my emphasis). Importantly, Rohmer stresses the necessity, in *I, Confess*, that *sacrifice itself is sacrificed*: the sin of the main character, a priest,

> is not that he has been a man before becoming a man of God, but, on the contrary, to have given way to the intimidation, the blackmail, of wanting to redeem by heroic and paradoxical conduct what need no longer be redeemed: to give way to the temptation of martyrdom. We find ourselves confronted not only with an allegory of the Fall but with a tragic situation worthy of that adjective and having as its mainspring, as in the novels of Georges Bernanos, the traps of sacrifice and sainthood.[29]

Heroism and martyrdom here are nothing but useless expedients whereby consciousness tries to acquire a consistency, a greatness and a substantiality it just cannot have, because it is only a thing floating on the outside.

Hitchcock's mastery lies precisely in his capability to display this transfer by completely visual means, and to visualize morality as a completely external (hence visual) matter circulating between the subjects. In *Strangers on a Train*, for instance, this is achieved by carefully organizing the recurrence of two visual motives: the straight line shuttling back and forth, and the circle. In *I, Confess*

> Glances are actually what Hitchcock uses all through the film as the basic threads of his web, the conducting canals through which the overflow of consciences is drained: the look of the inspector (Karl Malden), who watches the meeting between the priest and the wife of the counsellor with a single eye, the other being hidden by the head of his interlocutor; the look in the courtroom of Keller's wife, who is already on the verge of confession; Father Michael's look during the questioning, the trial, and in the final scene [...] In this story, in which the lips of the hero are voluntarily sealed, only these looks give us access to the mysteries of his thought. They are the most worthy and faithful messengers of the soul.[30]

28 *Ibid.*, p. 151.
29 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
30 *Ibid.*

By virtue of Hitchcock's visual inventiveness, 'an entire moral universe has been elaborated [...]. In Hitchcock's work form does not embellish content, it creates it.'[31] In other words, Hitchcock is an *auteur* because he aptly uses form to materialize its matter – not just *any* matter, but a *moral* matter. This moral matter touches upon *freedom* (or, in appropriately religious terms, *salvation*), and could be summarized as follows. Consciousness is wholly on the outside and has nothing to do with man's inner feelings and introspection; morality is thus not a matter of human intentions and deliberate actions, but is determined by superficial contingencies at an external level. To say that man is always guilty because of original sin, means to say that morality is affected by a structural, inescapable imbalance due to the fact that it is ruled by pure contingencies on which man has very little control; all man has to do is to embrace his 'guilt', i.e. the unbalanced contingency he's been allocated in spite of himself. It follows that freedom is not groundless, but is actually grounded on both this inescapable, structural condition (the 'original sin') and on the redeeming recognition of it. This moral matter is conveyed by Hitchcock by means of an appropriate form, i.e. by depicting the externality of consciousness and its external fluctuations (the 'transfer of guilt') in an appropriately *purely visual* way, by relying on abstract graphic inventions with a strong emphasis on surfaces and an equally strong neglect toward any kind of depth.

Crucially, all this was very clear already in the *Gazette du cinéma* days. In 1950, while reviewing *Under Capricorn*, Jacques Rivette already sketched a particularly perverse transfer of guilt, and insisted on the utter exteriority of Hitchcock's direction: 'The camera follows the characters as they move, but most of the time it refuses to penetrate and interfere in their inner lives.'[32] A sort of a pre-New Wave apogee of the pda after which all of the critics of that circle would gradually leave film criticism to start focus on filmmaking, Rohmer's and Chabrol's 1957 monograph brought to maturity premises that were laid out already in the late forties; as such, it is probably the most shining demonstration that the pda was deeply rooted in the early elaborations of the éS.[33]

All of the above explains why Hitchcock was a kind of quintessential *auteur* in the eyes of Rohmer, the perfect filmmaker to devote a monograph to.[34]

31 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

32 Rivette, 'Under Capricorn', p. 4. Originally: 'La caméra se soumet aux personnages dans leurs déplacements, mais se refuse le plus souvent à pénétrer et intervenir dans leur vie intérieure.'

33 For an appreciably detailed historical account of the éS/pda's endorsements of Hitchcock as an *auteur*, see Vest, 'The Emergence Of an Auteur: Hitchcock and French Film Criticism, 1950-1954'.

34 Tellingly, in 'Cinema, an Art of Space' (p. 28), Hitchcock's 'brilliant style' was reputed to be 'sometimes combined with an insufficiently rigorous concept of the relationship between

Very few directors matched Rohmer's ideas about cinema as closely as Hitchcock did. Since the very beginning of his activity as a film critic, Rohmer tried to theorize cinema as a kind of 'hyper-novel' capable to realize better than any novel could (at least in principle) the vocation of modern literature 'to show and not to tell'. Rohmer soon realized that what made cinema 'more novelistic than novels themselves', the fulfilment of literature's dream of utter impersonality, was its 'mechanical' absence of consciousness elsewhere than in perception itself. However, he also soon realized that Sartre's ontology, as well as his ensuing novelistic aesthetics, were ultimately unfit to accommodate such a tight convergence between perception and consciousness, in that they still admitted of a sort of conditioned, negative accessibility, upon self-reflection, to an individuated for-itself consciousness, temporally arranging phenomena according to a contingent, subjective bias (like an individuated narrator/reader/character/etc.). Sartre's perspective had to be discarded, because it ultimately succumbed to the same 'original sin' that in Rohmer's view infected Husserl's phenomenological strand since its own inception (thereby rendering it incapable to account for cinema), namely the attempt to 'integrate' Kantian philosophy by supplying to it (thanks to Descartes) a further notion of subjectivity it supposedly lacked. Kant, the primal source of that strand, was precisely the philosopher that eventually provided Rohmer with a theoretical framework that would more fittingly suit what cinema seemed to embody so well: external perception as the only accessible seat of consciousness, which cannot access itself through self-reflection. Hitchcock was the director who more than any other was able to sing this externality of consciousness, this foreignness to the subject itself, by insisting on the 'transfer of guilt'. Hitchcock's emphasis on visual appearance appeased either aesthetic and ethical needs: on the one hand, it proved that cinema could do without the burden of literature and could rely on appearance for appearance's sake; on the other hand, it showed that the eternal fight between freedom and necessity did not take place inside the heart and consciousness of man, but outside, in terms of appearances, on the surface; consciousness only had to accept and endorse this foreign, external necessity (in Hitchcock's catholic terms: to assume one's inevitable sins, for which one is not responsible for) in order to attain freedom (that is, salvation, by overcoming those sins).

In other words, Hitchcock's emphasis on externality, on the lack of internal substance of a completely externalized consciousness, perfectly

content and expression'; only after his conversion Rohmer would change his mind about the director's 'formalism'.

suited Rohmer's position, according to which cinema had to get rid of the novelistic, reflective, Sartrean, contingent, temporalizing consciousness, i.e. the nothingness adding itself to the definite, 'positional' consciousness of objects, and to embrace appearance for appearance's sake (to manifest, and not to express). What exactly 'appearance for appearance's sake' meant, Rohmer found out only after he returned to Kant *against* Sartre, viz. to a view of consciousness qua purely formal (transcendental) and utterly inaccessible to self-reflection: the only effective self-reflection could take place in apperception itself, as its coherence and unity could only be ensured precisely by the 'I think', the unity of consciousness accompanying every apperception. In short, appearance for appearance's sake began to mean 'our ordinary vision of things' in terms of Kant's 'unity of nature', i.e. on the one hand mechanism (the order and regularity of appearances, appearing to us according to mechanical laws of causal, objective succession), and on the other hand beauty and freedom, as mechanism's flip sides. An *auteur* was precisely someone who was able to cope with the triumph of exteriority over interiority 'appearance for appearance's sake' stood for, entailing a relationship between consciousness and Being that was no longer mediated by negativity and separateness (as per Sartre's Heideggerian perspective), but by the substantial involvement of consciousness in the immediate production of appearances, to such an extent that no individuated consciousness had to be discernible apart from appearances. Rohmer seems to have thought that the necessary, irreversible, spatialized temporal succession put together by cinema's externalized imagination broke with Sartrean/Heideggerian, novelistic, contingent, human, temporalizing consciousness, to engender instead a sort of inhuman, purely cinematic, *inherently narrative* (dialectical, as per Astruc's definition) logic providing the background against which beauty and freedom could emerge by way of contrast, thanks to the reversal between the inside and the outside typically crowning the *solitude morale* tales, the contemporary version of that timeless representation of the struggle between freedom and necessity that is ancient tragedy.

Rohmer never spelled out these ideas explicitly, but his texts clearly imply them as the background driving the choices, the assessments, the preferences and the arguments contained in his written production as a film critic. Moreover, these assumptions, along with the critic's ambiguous classicism and universalism, ended up profoundly influencing the younger cinephiles and critics who in the late 1940s and in the early 1950s began to be associated with him – the so-called éS. All of them basically regarded films as 'hyper-novels' capable to fulfil literature's dream of 'Flaubertian' impersonality, its promise to give up customary, individuated literary consciousness, viz.

to reach the longed-for coincidence between consciousness and perception. Although they were all (except perhaps Rivette) far less theoretically and philosophically aware than Rohmer, the way they looked at films was profoundly affected by the ethical and aesthetic corollaries of Rohmer's idea that the phenomenological framework (Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and the like) could not really fit cinema's overcoming of the novelistic horizon, i.e. cinema's capability to embody a consciousness that is nowhere but within perception itself, and that the only fitting framework for that could be Kant's, qua the distant origin of phenomenology. For them, films mirrored human consciousness/perception, which is to say, in Kantian terms, that they followed the unity of nature (the overall, causality-oriented coherence whereby things appear to us), which is to say in turn that they revolved around the deployment of *cinematic* (*narrative*) *action* qua the mechanical background for freedom and beauty to emerge by departing from it.

As years went by, Rohmer's influence became less cumbersome, and Chabrol, Godard, Rivette and Truffaut started to develop more personal approaches. As the follow-up book of the present research will outline in more detail, Rivette's Hegelianism would soon start to adjoin and complement Rohmer's Kantism, and the ensuing tension between the two would significantly affect François Truffaut's film criticism. More generally, the forthcoming volume will make clear that the pda consisted primarily of the advocacy of a *specific* notion of cinematic subjectivity. However, without a proper grasp of the background this book has attempted to elucidate, viz. the shared, mostly implicit, 'Rohmerian' one characterizing the éS, it would be impossible to correctly pin down the contours of the specific notion of cinematic subjectivity advocated by the pda, as the latter largely ensued from that original background.

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Abbreviations

CC = *Cahiers du Cinéma*
éS = *école Schérer*
pda = *politique des auteurs*

About the Author

Marco Grosoli has been a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Kent (Canterbury) between 2012 and 2015, and is currently Assistant Professor in Film Studies at Habib University (Karachi, Pakistan). Also an occasional film critic, he has written (along with several book chapters and journal articles) the first Italian-language monograph on Béla Tarr (*Armonie contro il giorno*, Bébert 2014) and he's working on two more: one (on the *politique des auteurs* trend in French film criticism, 1954-1960) will be the follow-up to the present volume; the other is entitled *The Academic World Through the Lens of Yakuza Films*.

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